Reconstructing Tradition

Advaita Ācārya and Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism at the Cusp of the Twentieth Century

Rebecca J. Manring

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THIS BOOK, WHICH NO LONGER bears much resemblance to the dissertation it began as, has been well over a decade in the making and owes its completion to more people and institutions than I can properly thank.

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

EXCEPT WHEN ANOTHER SPELLING is in current English usage, I have used Standard Academic Transliteration for all Sanskrit and Bengali words and names. In so doing I treat Bengali according to the same transliteration rules as Sanskrit, that is, the inherent vowel is always indicated and consonant clusters are represented as spelled. In those cases where an individual uses a particular Romanization of his or her name, I have used that individual's preferred spelling. This has often resulted in a few inconsistencies. When I cite or refer to individuals in an English-language context, I spell the name according to their preference in English, with no diacritics. When referring to or citing the same individuals in a Bengali context where the name appears in the Bengali language and script, I use the transliterated spelling, with the requisite diacritical marks.

Similarly, I use the most familiar spellings of the names of cities, reserving the use of diacritics for less-known toponyms. For cities I have used contemporary names. Recently Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta have officially changed to the older, precolonial designations Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata, and I use the latter.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

RECONSTRUCTING TRADITION

Introduction

> *Advaita Prakāśa* is the oldest of all the (early Gauḍīya) texts.
>
> . . .
>
> Īśāna Nāgara was the disciple and companion of Shantipur's famous Advaita Ācārya . . . . He described Advaita's life story as he had witnessed it. . . . The book was composed in 1568, when Īśāna was 70 years old. Vṛndāvana Dāsa's *Caitanya Bhāgavata* was composed in 1570, so the *Advaita Prakāśa* is two years older, and no major work in Bengali was composed prior to it.
>
> . . .
>
> After a great deal of effort we have managed to collect a copy of a 1781 manuscript of the *Advaita Prakāśa*. The original book is in Jhākpāla, and I saw it there and copied it.[1]

THE ABOVE ANNOUNCEMENT APPEARED in 1896 in Bengal's most prestigious literary journal of the day, the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*. But, as it turns out, the report is not entirely accurate, for the text was neither written in the sixteenth century, nor was its author Īśāna Nāgara. The *Advaita Prakāśa* (AP) is a late-nineteenth-century hagiography authored not by Īśāna Nāgara but by Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi. The text treats the life of Advaita Ācārya, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century scholar unanimously hailed as the father of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Advaita Ācārya's years of austerities and constant pleading with Kṛṣṇa to incarnate to solve the ills of the day, the movement's historians report, finally led to the advent of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi was a direct descendant of Advaita, a scholar of and from the Sylhet region of Advaita's birth. Why did Acyutacaraṇa compose this text and promote it not as his own work but as that of a much earlier and otherwise unknown writer? And who was Advaita Ācārya?

Advaita Ācārya (1434–1559),[2] born Kamalākṣa Bhaṭṭācārya, serves in many respects as the herald of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. That movement's hagiographers are in agreement on the broad outlines of his life. Advaita was the eighth child of Kubera and Lābhā, a brahman couple whose other children either died at birth or became renunciates at a very early age. Before this last child was born, his parents had despaired of having a child to comfort them in their old age and had decided to retire to their home in Shantipur, on the bank of the Gaṅgā, to live out their days in prayer and meditation. Summoned home by Kubera's former employer, a local ruler, the couple returned to the Kingdom of Lāūḍa shortly before Lābhā was due to deliver her child.

Advaita was born in the village of Navagrāma, twenty miles up the Surmā River from Sunāmgañj in what is now Sylhet District in northeastern Bangladesh.[3] He left that region and moved to Nadīyā, some forty-five miles north of present-day Kolkata, as a young man, to study with a renowned scholar then residing on the banks of the Gaṅgā just outside the town of Shantipur. Advaita Ācārya lived the remainder of his life in Shantipur, although after Caitanya's renunciation he spent the rainy seasons in Puri[4] for as long as Caitanya lived.

A diligent scholar, Advaita was an excellent Sanskritist, we are told, and quickly mastered every text he encountered. He soon opened his own school and began training local young brahman men, and, as his reputation spread, students came from far and wide to study under his tutelage, including, eventually, the young Viśvambhara Miśra (Caitanya). Advaita Ācārya was already over fifty years of age when Caitanya was born in 1486, and Caitanya lived until 1533. Advaita outlived him, some say, by more than two decades.

Advaita Ācārya was probably the eldest member of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school. He seems to have already acquired a significant following of disciples through his teaching and orthodox Vedantic erudition by the time of Caitanya's birth, yet once Caitanya came of age as a religious leader Advaita Ācārya aligned himself closely with Caitanya's new group, subordinating himself to the much younger man and his message of ecstatic devotion.

By all accounts an extraordinarily long-lived gentleman, he oversaw the birth and infancy of the Gauḍīya (Bengali) Vaiṣṇava movement introduced by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.[5] *Vaiṣṇavism* is an adjective formed from the name *Viṣṇu*, one of the most important gods in Indian religions, understood to appear on earth in various forms at crucial times of chaos and upheaval to restore righteousness. Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are the most popular of those forms. Worshippers of Viṣṇu fall into several philosophical camps, ranging from monistic to dualistic, with several combinations in between. The theologians of the dualistic schools define liberation (*mokṣa*), the ultimate goal, as the attainment of an eternal and personal relation-



Map of Bangladesh

ship with the divine. For the Bengali school in particular, that "divine" means Kṛṣṇa, the source of all *avatāras* or divine descents (from heaven to earth).

Caitanya's followers recognized him as the (divine) incarnation of the age, and usually as a joint embodiment of Kṛṣṇa (the Supreme Lord) and his favorite lover Rādhā. Advaita is unanimously acknowledged, in Vaiṣṇava literature, as the instrumental cause for the advent of Caitanya. By all accounts disturbed by what he perceived as a general state of chaos and irreligious behavior, Advaita Ācārya stormed heaven with his strenuous austerities and unrelenting devotion, often roaring out his impassioned pleas at the top of his lungs. At long last Kṛṣṇa, always

moved by the love of his devotees, was forced to take human birth in this degenerate age to rescue humanity from its own ignorance and foolishness.

Kṛṣṇa devotion is a relative newcomer to Bengal. Other strong regional traditions include Śāktism (goddess worship), Śaivism (worship of the god Śiva), and the various less clearly definable movements of the *sahajiyās*, advocates of the so-called natural religion that uses sexual ritual to attain the divine. No one can say how old any of these strands is, although the *sahajiyās* seem to have attached themselves to Vaiṣṇavism in the seventeenth century. And Islam was also making serious inroads into the region, bringing new people in to settle previously unpopulated areas.[6] Given the presence of these other groups, the Vaiṣṇava theologians and other writers needed to make very clear statements about how they differed from the others and why what they had to offer was more likely to guarantee spiritual success.

In the early years of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement Advaita was much celebrated. While Advaita Ācārya did attract a sizable following and his spiritual lineage continues to this day, from the beginning his rival and Caitanya's other lieutenant Nityānanda led a larger group. Nityānanda's school continued to grow even after the passing of the first generation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava leadership and remained quite large some four centuries later when Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi was an active scholar. But, in the meantime, the number of Advaita's followers had diminished dramatically.

One factor that may have led to the shrinkage of Advaita's group is the defection of a number of his followers. Several of Advaita's disciples broke away from his tutelage, perhaps when he made it clear that he was preaching not monism but Caitanya's *mādhurya bhāva* brand of Vaiṣṇavism. The name of one of these, Śaṅkara, has become confused with that of the man credited with the introduction of *bhakti* into Assam in the last decade of the fifteenth century.[7] One division developed between Sītā's and Acyuta's[8] groups and that led by Kāmadeva, which may have been caused by the latter group's elevating Advaita Ācārya, not Caitanya, to the position of the incarnation for the age. Advaita's biographers clearly state that Advaita Ācārya neither sought nor condoned his disciples' worship as the *avatāra*.

Advaita Ācārya appears to address this very issue, as well as other sectarian problems, in his final remarks to his sons, in chapter 21 of the AP. Advaita denounces all those who have no interest in devotion to Kṛṣṇa as non-Vaiṣṇavas and then further defines people who ignore Kṛṣṇa as Vaiṣṇavas with no sectarian affiliation and Vaiṣṇavas who do not worship Caitanya; he decries "those among our own people whose hearts are hard," who do not accept Caitanya as supreme. Advaita states clearly that "Gaura [Caitanya] is the object of my worship." This discussion suggests that at the time AP was composed there was some contro-

versy about worshipping Caitanya as Kṛṣṇa as well as controversy among some of Advaita's disciples who revered their own guru as the incarnation of the age.

We find more telling (though subtle) description of possible rifts in the final chapter of AP, where Īśāna describes Advaita Ācārya's "disappearance."[9] Advaita invited the leaders of the seven Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava lineages that had arisen after Caitanya's death, with their followers, to Shantipur for a large *saṅkīrtana* festival. These seven leaders were Advaita's three eldest sons Acyuta, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, and Gopāla, Nityānanda's son Vīracandra, Narahari Sarkāra, Gaurīdāsa Paṇḍita, and Dāmodara Paṇḍita. The implication of having all seven schools represented at the moment of Advaita Ācārya's disappearance is that, despite whatever differences may have arisen among the various members of the Vaiṣṇava inner circle, all were united in their devotion to Kṛṣṇa and to Caitanya. But, beyond that, Advaita's school unites all varieties of Kṛṣṇa devotion under his leadership. In his own family we find both householders and renunciates, devotional singers and philosophers. This festival seems to represent an effort to pull together the different segments of the Vaiṣṇava community. Noticeably absent, however, are Advaita's fourth son Balarāma and any member of the Vṛndāvana branch.

Īśāna also writes, at the end of chapter 21 of his AP, that Advaita Ācārya's sons Balarāma and Jagadīśa each had their own followers and set up their own temple after Kṛṣṇa Miśra was given charge of their father's Madana Gopāla image that Kṛṣṇa had many years previously directed him to uncover in Vraja (see chapters 2 and 6 for details). AP's author implies that they had accepted their own father as the incarnation of the age, rather than Caitanya, and were worshipping Advaita (apparently counter to Advaita's own wishes), not Caitanya, as Kṛṣṇa, which may account for their exclusion from the list of leaders of the seven schools mentioned above.

Thus philosophical differences among Advaita's sons and other followers led to fragmentation of his lineage and to differences of opinion about who was truly carrying on their father's teachings. The number of Advaita's followers continued to shrink, and today his group constitutes the smallest of the publicly acknowledged Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava schools.

His name and fame were revived, during a period when the tradition sought to purify and resurrect itself in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when elite Bengalis were seeking to recover lost literature with which to construct their own national heritage. Three relevant major texts surfaced at this time, one treating Advaita's childhood, one his entire life, and one on his primary wife. A number of shorter works also surfaced around this time.

The profusion of texts treating Advaita Ācārya is quite remarkable. Equally remarkable is the dearth of manuscript versions of those texts, and even more mysterious is the complete absence of any reference to them in any of the

standard Vaiṣṇava literature produced by the larger tradition, that is, outside of Advaita's own lineage. These texts have had a very limited circulation. Any scholar who has worked in manuscript libraries in South Asia is not surprised to learn of the loss of such materials due to insects, mildew, weather, and, unfortunately, often simple neglect. It is quite possible, then, that these texts were once readily available. But the Gauḍīya writers are notorious for their name-dropping proclivities, and quote freely from each other, and so one would expect that at least a few of these authors would have mentioned something about the Advaita corpus. However, none does. One is forced to wonder whether these Gauḍīya writers even had access to the Advaita materials, and I believe that very few did.

Evidence suggests that none of the texts treating Advaita Ācārya was in wide circulation. And indeed the manuscripts are located in a very few major libraries, most of which are in Kolkata. The author of the *Advaita Prakāśa* was able to take advantage of the relatively new printing business to disseminate his work widely, but the AP was the first of these compositions to be published.

In recent years the larger Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community has even condemned the Advaita Ācārya materials as "inauthentic." Advaita's own descendants and followers may share this skepticism about authenticity. That is to say, many doubt the purported dates of composition and even that the texts were written by their alleged authors. Most of the works in question were indeed produced long after Advaita's death, and take some radical theological stances. These very texts, however, now define Advaita's school, and have ultimately come to be included in the hagiographical canon, albeit reluctantly by some, and are recited on festival days associated with Advaita Ācārya. None, however, has been accepted as canonical by the larger group or by any of the smaller groups aside from Advaita Ācārya's own lineage.

The entire Advaita Ācārya corpus with its mysterious provenance leaves us with several questions. Why were so many texts generated, when the Caitanya corpus already contains numerous references to Advaita? And when did they first appear? Advaita's group is the only one to produce hagiographies on its own leader (rather than on Caitanya) in its first generation. But while numerous authors cite passages from various of the Caitanya biographies, no one outside Advaita Ācārya's own school so much as mentions the name or author of any of the texts treating Advaita.

Biographies of Caitanya began to appear shortly after his death. By that time his followers had divided into several factions, led by such devotees as Nityānanda, Advaita, Narahari Sarkāra, and the six *gosvāmīs*[10] who had earlier been sent to Vṛndāvana to continue the tasks of recovering lost sites of Kṛṣṇa's activities and codifying Caitanya's theology. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja hints in his *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*

that this fragmentation was already becoming apparent during Caitanya's lifetime. Subgroups formed under the leadership or influence of the strongest figures in the early years of the movement, some of whose views and approaches were quite different from those of Caitanya. Advaita's followers too formed their own branch of the new religion and, for them, Advaita may have been more important even than Caitanya. The first of their hagiographical creations makes this clear. Their authors "remembered" numerous miracles Advaita performed during his lifetime and demonstrate that he was indeed a man like no other.

Most of the material treating Advaita was produced at different times than was the Caitanya corpus; its authors lived in different political as well as social circumstances, which informed their work in new ways. In this study I will explore the circumstances that led to the production of this literature on Advaita.

These texts, with their purported dates of composition and authors, are

1. *Bālya Līlā Sūtra* ("The Treatise on [his] Childhood Activities"), 1487, Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa;
2. *Advaita Maṅgala* ("Praise of Advaita"), prior to 1713, Haricaraṇa Dāsa;
3. *Advaita Prakāśa* ("The Glories of Advaita"), 1568, Īśāna Nāgara.

A fourth text, the *Sītā Caritra* ("The Life of Sītā"), by Lokanātha Dāsa, is extant in a few manuscripts, none of which is dated, and one published edition. In addition, several shorter texts that are not strictly hagiographical but treat Advaita's practices are worth mentioning:

1. *Advaitoddeśa-Dīpikā* ("The Light of Advaita's Instructions"), late eighteenth century, Devakīnandana Dāsa;
2. *Advaita-Svarūpāmṛta* ("The Nectar of Advaita's True Form"), late seventeenth century, Kānudeva Gosvāmī;
3. *Advaita-Sūtra-Kaḍacā* ("Advaita's Notebook"), three texts bearing the same name, extant in several manuscripts from the mid nineteenth century, some attributed to Advaita Ācārya himself;
4. *Nitāi-Advaita-Tattva* ("The Essence of Nityānanda and Advaita"), extant only in one undated manuscript;
5. *Advaita-Vilāsa* ("The Pastimes of Advaita"), two distinct texts bearing the same title. One is extant only in two incomplete, undated manuscripts. The other, by Vireśvara Pramāṇika, is an 1899 compilation of material from the three major hagiographies listed above.

These hagiographies, with one exception (the *Bālya Līlā Sūtra*), treat Advaita's entire life. The events of his life fit the typologies observed by several scholars of

South Asian religious biography, and modeled on the much earlier work on the hero pattern, by a number of folklorists and Freudian scholars.[11] These scholars observed marked similarities in hero stories cross-culturally, despite in many cases the extreme unlikelihood of interactions between groups. Hagiography constitutes a subtype of the hero story. Miraculous elements are very much present, but not consistently throughout the corpus. That is, prior works display less of the miraculous and the remarkable than do later works. The more distant in time from his subject, the more astonishing an author's descriptions of that subject.

We expect to find lists of miracles, whether walking on water, traveling hundreds of miles in an instant, or switching gender, in hagiography. We are equally unsurprised to find the hero visited in dreams by gods or earlier saints, who often have important instructions to convey. And he will be exceptionally brilliant, able to memorize every text he hears instantly. Other, older, and more famous scholars will challenge his erudition, and he will defeat every one. He will convert nonbelievers, demons, prostitutes, and the like to his religious views. He will undertake long and arduous journeys, often on pilgrimage, and will live a longer life than most will believe possible. In addition, we find problems surrounding the birth of Advaita, corresponding to Lorenzen's observation in his *nirguṇa* saints' typology;[12] and Advaita's pregnant mother had several prophetic dreams, as Jackson found common in hagiographies of South Indian singer-saints.[13] But these are not motifs unique to the religious biographies of South Asia.

Scholars working in many religious traditions have long been aware of certain elements that most hagiographical literature has in common. Earlier material produced in one community may become the template for subsequent hagiographies, as will become clear in the case with some of the Advaita works. The events in the life and character of an established saint often find their way into works about others, as subtle verifiers of the new author's portrayal of his subject as truly extraordinary.

The authors tell Advaita's story for the most part in chronological order, though the *Sītā Caritra* (SC), which treats his primary wife, is a more anecdotal work on her teachings and some of her followers. Most of the texts are written in the Middle Bengali their protagonists would have spoken. The *Bālya Līlā Sūtra* (BLS) is in Sanskrit, and the *Sītā Caritra* uses both languages. Language choice can itself constitute a significant portion of an author's message to readers, as even language has status in society.

Dating problems in the Advaita Ācārya corpus are compounded by questions of authenticity that arose in the secondary literature produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first to discuss these issues is Bimanbihari Majumdar in his 1939 Ph.D. dissertation, "Śrīcaitanyera Caritrera Upādāna." Majumdar found the narrative discrepancies among the various Vaiṣṇava biog-

raphies disturbing, and this concern dominates his critical assessment of the Advaita Ācārya corpus.

For example, two of the texts, the BLS and the AP, purport to have been written very early (1487 and 1568, respectively), but Majumdar posits a nineteenth-century date of composition based on the questionable premise that only the Caitanya biographies, and, in particular, the CC, are accurate portrayals of the activities of Caitanya and other leading figures in the formative years of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Because the BLS and the AP present stories either not told in the Caitanya corpus or tell those stories differently than do the other hagiographers, they must, according to Majumdar, be inaccurate and therefore "inauthentic."

Majumdar was operating from a historical positivist approach, that is, from the presupposition that the biographies were historical documents. This assumption led him to believe that conflicting narrative accounts must represent deviations from truth. He accepted the Caitanya biographies as the literary and sectarian standard.

However, the designation of inauthenticity was never clearly defined, and has been used in different ways in the secondary literature. A text might be considered inauthentic if it departed from an orthodox philosophical position or contained ideological, historical, or linguistic anachronisms. Or it could be considered inauthentic in terms of historical accuracy, or the author's reputation, or because of doubts concerning its stated date of composition, but these criteria have not been clearly formulated up to now.

Each of the putative writers tells us of his intimate association with Advaita, and all write with the authority their physical and emotional proximity would allow. One was Kubera's employer, one was a servant in Advaita's household, and one was a disciple of Advaita's eldest son. Some of the compositions, their authors report, were commissioned by members of Advaita's family, and the authors insist they are not worthy or capable of such an assignment but will fulfill it, nonetheless, out of their sense of duty to the guru. This is typical Vaiṣṇava humility, and is not unique to South Asia. Thomas Hefferman, working with medieval Christian saints, noted that often the texts he studied open with the author's claim that he is not really qualified for the task but undertook it at the specific request of a superior.[14]

These authors' positions in the family often place them as witnesses to the events, miraculous and mundane, that they describe, and lend their words an authority we might be less willing to grant to writers merely reporting hearsay. In many cases their positions render them invisible elsewhere in sectarian literature. This means that the reader can neither confirm nor deny the accounts in these texts. The eyewitness status of these authors not only makes them unimpeachable witnesses, as it establishes their very intimate proximity to the sa-

cred. It also grants us as readers direct *darśana,*[15] through their words, of their subject(s). Because of the closeness the writers experienced and describe, we, too, can get closer to Advaita by reading their works. Thus an eyewitness hagiographer serves a different purpose than one writing years later, in that he is a conduit for the blessings, and indeed the very sacrality, of his subject to readers throughout time.

One factor common in South Asian hagiography that is not present in Christian lives of the saints is the assumption of divinity. All of the writers describe Advaita as divine, though to different extents in the various texts. In the Caitanya works, which depict their protagonist as either Kṛṣṇa or a joint incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Advaita's chief role is that of herald of the new age of devotion. Advaita's own followers, however, see his significance as considerably greater than that, averring that he is varying forms of Kṛṣṇa himself, from partial incarnation to full incarnation, and, in one noteworthy case, seem to suggest that Advaita is more fully divine than even Caitanya and thus more important. This is a radical departure from the standard Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. None of the hagiographical material on any of the other early sectarian leaders makes such a bold claim about its subject.

For the Gauḍīyas, Kṛṣṇa is the source of all *avatāras,* and Viṣṇu is simply a form of Kṛṣṇa. Some of Advaita's hagiographers posit him as Kṛṣṇa, but, as we watch the metaphors they use to create each scenario in which he appears, we see that they do not always intend the same Kṛṣṇa. The writers have several options from which to choose: the beloved and mischievous child, the playful adolescent, and even the staid, married Kṛṣṇa of his adult days as a king in Dvārakā, each of which will signal a different message to readers.

All the texts, both in the Caitanya hagiographical corpus and in Advaita's own hagiographies, ascribe some measure of divinity to Advaita. But Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has produced a number of different metaphorical models of divine incarnation. The *gosvāmīs* Rūpa and Jīva, for example, developed the notion of partial incarnation (*aṁśāvatāra*) by which different amounts of divine presence and power are simultaneously embodied in various people. In his *Saṁkṣepa Bhagavatāmṛta* Rūpa defines *aṁśa* as "that *avatāra* in which the all-powerful expresses only a part of his infinite power, while a *pūrṇa avatāra* occurs where all the powers are fully manifested."[16]

Another vision of divine incarnation is presented in Haricaraṇa Dāsa's AM. He views Advaita and Caitanya as equal but not simultaneous manifestations of divinity. According to this paradigm Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the ideal joint object of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotion, incarnate serially in Kali Yuga, each to prepare the way for the succeeding degree of divine embodiment as the Vraja *līlā* appears on earth, with divine culmination in the advent of the erotic mood personified in

Caitanya. Thus, according to AM, Kṛṣṇa first appeared in the person of Advaita, accompanied by Rādhā in the form of Sītā, and later the divine couple appeared united in the single body of Caitanya.

The serial incarnation scheme dovetails with that of the devotional continuum. While Caitanya as the dual incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa embodies the erotic mood, divinity appears first in the majestic mood, in the person of Advaita Ācārya. Other members of the Vaiṣṇava community, all older than Caitanya, personified other devotional modes: Advaita Ācārya's devotee Haridāsa epitomizes the mood of servitude, Nityānanda embodies friendship, Sītā Devī parental affection, and, finally, Caitanya himself the erotic mood.

A second role for Advaita (and other early leaders) developed as Caitanya matured and launched his active ministry, with his renunciation and move to Puri and subsequent withdrawal into a more or less permanent state of *Rādhā bhāva*.[17] This shift constitutes a new phase as well in the institutional growth of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. By that time Caitanya had begun to depute certain of his followers to perform specific tasks in specific locations in order to disseminate the new faith. For example, Caitanya is said to have assigned Nityānanda and Advaita to spread the faith in Bengal, and, more to the point of this phase of his own life, to have sent Rūpa, Sanātana, and their nephew Jīva to Vṛndāvana with instructions to produce scriptures explaining the new sect's theology and praxis. The *gosvāmīs* turned to *rasa śāstra* (texts treating aesthetic theory), and to the works of Abhinavagupta in particular, to find a scriptural basis for the Gauḍīya approach to divinity through the emotions. Rūpa's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi* very neatly use Sanskrit poetic convention to describe the devotional path Caitanya advocated. Thus in the formative years of this school, alone among the major Vaiṣṇava groups, aesthetic theory took precedence over Vedānta as the scriptural legitimator of the group and its practices.

While we find different theological representations of Advaita and his identity, we also find different interpretations of the type of theology he propounded. Advaita's shifting position can perhaps best be understood in terms of the continuum of devotion that characterizes Vaiṣṇava worship and attitudes toward the divine (see figure 1). Vaiṣṇavas work to develop a personal relationship with the object of their devotion. The various schools all provide techniques for doing so, and some privilege a different type of relationship than do the Gauḍīyas. For the Gauḍīyas, though, *aiśvarya*, awesome majesty, the mood in which one regards the divine as so far above herself as to be almost inaccessible, and also deserving of the most respectful reverence, lies at the beginning of the continuum and is the least desirable way to approach Kṛṣṇa. However, this is the mode that best characterizes varieties of devotionalism that were current in Caitanya's

aiśvarya	*śānta*	*dāsya*	*sakhya*	*vatsalya*	*mādhurya*
majesty	calm	servitude	friendship	parental love	erotic sweetness
Advaita Ācārya					Kṛṣṇa Caitanya

FIGURE 1.1 *Continuum of Divinity*

day, and so provides his devotees with a clear point of departure for their own devotional practices.

The next stage is *śānta,* peacefulness and calm, in which one maintains a state of equilibrium about one's relationship to the divine, neither overly excited nor in the awe of the previous stage.

Third is *dāsya,* servitude, in which the devotee ministers to the lord as his servant, striving to anticipate his every need and see to all his physical and other comforts. *Dāsya* is the fulcrum on which the continuum pivots, the balance point between relationships in which there is some distance between god and devotee and those in which intimacy features heavily. (Some Gauḍīya theologians, however, omit *śānta.*)

Next is *sakhya,* friendship, the relationship of equals. This is the mood of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā.* The devotee has become considerably closer to the object of worship, and the awesome reverence found earlier has now been dispelled.

Vatsalya, parental affection, is a still more intimate relationship. Here the object of devotion, whom worshippers regard as their child, is at the mercy of the devotee, much as a small child is entirely dependent on its parents.

The most intimate human relationship of all is that of erotic sweetness, *mādhurya.* In this mood no barriers remain between the partners, and so *mādhurya* became the preferred mood of worship for the Gauḍīyas. Just as a lover will take any risk to once again enjoy the intensity of sexual union with the beloved, so, too, must the devotee long for God.

Writers commonly indicate in which mode their subject usually worshipped Kṛṣṇa. Most, particularly among the Caitanya hagiographers, view Advaita Ācārya as firmly ensconced at the majestic end of the continuum; thus he represented the older approach to devotion, and could serve as the anchor connecting the new movement to time-honored tradition.

However, we also find Advaita metaphorically shown at different stages along the continuum. In one of the hagiographies he progresses its full length, while in others he moves from stage to stage in a less orderly fashion, suggesting that he, and by extension the entire school, is at home in every devotional mood. At the outset of most of the hagiographies Advaita is described as a joint incarnation of Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva. As Mahāviṣṇu, who is for Vaiṣṇavas outside Bengal the source of all *avatāras*, he stands at the beginning of the continuum. This god, responsible for all creation, rests between ages on the body of the multiheaded serpent-bed Ananta (eternity) in the mighty cosmic ocean of milk, with his consort Lakṣmī at his feet and the god Brahmā springing from his navel on a lotus at the moment creation is about to begin again. One cannot imagine a human being engaged in any sort of personal relationship with such a majestic god, each of whose four hands holds a massive and intimidating emblem. (Sadāśiva is not even on the continuum, as the continuum is a construct of Vaiṣṇava, not Śaiva, thinking. Sadāśiva represents the immovable, imperturbable ascetic—again, a deity with whom one would not be likely to enjoy a personal relationship.)

By the time of Caitanya's death, two clear branches of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had begun to emerge: one among the transplanted community in Vṛndāvana, as discussed above, that came to represent sectarian orthodoxy and a second that soon splintered further under the leadership of Caitanya's immediate disciples and their relatives at home in Bengal. The Vṛndāvana group's practices centered on the ritual activities the *gosvāmīs* had designed and focussed on worship and service of Kṛṣṇa (or Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa).

The Bengali branch, on the other hand, worshipped Caitanya himself as the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa or Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, with different means of worship being propounded by the various leaders who came to prominence in the years shortly after Caitanya's death. Perhaps, as Caitanya's followers struggled to form their communal identity, attention shifted away from the role Advaita and other pioneers had originally played for them. The very existence of so many biographies of Advaita Ācārya suggests that one concern among his followers was his being forgotten.

A further phase of the institutional development of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism comes into play in the early eighteenth century in Jaipur, far from Bengal. At a crucial time, when the Gauḍīyas' rights to worship in one particular temple in Jaipur were being questioned, Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa produced, on their behalf and in record time, a commentary on *Brahma Sūtra* that served to legitimate his school.[18]

Each of the four previously established Vaiṣṇava *sampradāyas* (schools) had been sanctioned since the twelfth century and were authenticated by philosophical (Vedānta) commentaries on *Brahma Sūtras*, each of which constituted a

different interpretation of the *sūtras* than that which had been propounded by Śaṅkara several centuries earlier. Just as Śaṅkara's nondualistic exegesis delineated a recognizable philosophy around which an organization could develop, so the commentaries produced by the various Vaiṣṇava groups several centuries later formed the bases for their sectarian organizations.

Once the Gauḍīyas had achieved official recognition in the eyes of the other major Indian Vaiṣṇava schools and had developed their own creed by producing a formal philosophical commentary, the respectability and credibility Advaita Ācārya originally provided became redundant. This would become poignantly clear within one hundred years, as the numbers of his followers dwindled dramatically.

Another phase in the life of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism begins in the late nineteenth century. By this time Christian missionaries had established a strong presence in rural Bengal, with a school and publishing industry in Serampore, not far from Nadīyā. Bengal was now, in Acyutacaraṇa's time, a very different place than it had been in Caitanya's. Now the foreign rulers were not the Muslim Turks, but the Christian British. They had made their capital in Kolkata, some ninety kilometers south of Navadvīpa, so the Gauḍīyas felt their presence keenly.

Christian missionary presence in Bengal significantly predates the British Raj, but Christian influence in the area became a major social factor in the mid nineteenth century and spurred numerous reforms within Bengali society itself, including, for example, the reorganization of the Gauḍīya Maṭha, the monastic branch of this Vaiṣṇava school. The Gauḍīyas, and especially the less orthodox among them, were, like other Hindus (and Muslims, to a lesser degree), often subjected to scathing criticism of their practices from many of the Europeans in the area. Not only were Bengalis still suffering under foreign domination, but this time the foreigners were attempting to force their educational system as well as their religion on their colonized subjects. Faced with religious practices they had never seen before, and often unable to speak Bengali, some British administrators condemned what they encountered of local religious practices. Although Advaita's lineage maintained its reputation for orthodoxy and respectability, one can imagine their struggle to maintain that brahmanical purity while surrounded by and forced to interact with these various foreigners.

In fact many Bengalis, as well as other Indians, had long held a dim view of such practices as *sati* and child marriage, and so this criticism, in some cases, spurred reform from within the tradition. In chapter 4 we explore the efforts of the Brāhmo Samāja and its founder Devendranātha Tagore and early leaders like Ram Mohan Roy simultaneously to reform Indian religions from within and to accommodate this sort of criticism. A different technique of accommodation would be to appropriate the mythology familiar to the Europeans and

demonstrate that the sorts of miracles they claimed to be unique to their own religious leader were, in fact, not unique at all, but common indications of spiritual greatness that cross religious boundaries.

Among the early leaders of the Brāhmo Samāja was one of Advaita's direct descendants, Vijayakṛṣṇa Gosvāmī. Vijayakṛṣṇa eventually left that movement to return to his devotional roots. This tenth-generation descendant discovered some personal items that had belonged to Advaita Ācārya and spent many years in devotional activities in Shantipur, in time collecting a large following, and in effect partially resurrecting the memory of his famous ancestor. While Vijayakṛṣṇa Gosvāmī turned his back on urban life and Western education, many others did not, and in so doing he did his best to perpetuate the legacy of his illustrious ancestor.

Perhaps Advaita Ācārya was once again the man to connect his people to ancient erudition and grant them renewed respectability, particularly in terms of caste purity, while demonstrating his deep devotion to god. His resurrection in communal memory comes at a time when Bengalis are seeking to recover their own history and literature, indeed their very identity. Advaita Ācārya, a son of the soil, could provide them a rallying figure for their efforts. And so we begin with Advaita's own roots within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Because we are exploring the position of a uniquely significant figure in the formative years of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, we will first look at how Advaita is portrayed in the hagiographical material treating Caitanya and then examine each of the works treating Advaita Ācārya, and his primary wife Sītā Devī, in detail.

The *Advaita Maṅgala* (AM) will serve as the anchor text among the Advaita hagiographies. The AM is probably the earliest of the corpus, composed some time in the seventeenth century not terribly long after the first generation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas had all died. Little of the controversy surrounding subsequent Advaita Ācārya hagiographies has touched this work.

The core of the Advaita Ācārya corpus, and its appearance at a pivotal moment in the history of Bengal, at the turn of the twentieth century, is a late effort to reconstruct the community under a purely Bengali, and probably a purely brahmanical, banner. Several of the texts treating Advaita were clearly produced to construct the Advaita Ācārya branch of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition as its most legitimate branch, and certainly as the most staunchly brahmanically pure.

This was not the first such attempt in the greater Gauḍīya movement. The revelation of these texts, if not their very composition, was largely orchestrated by the remarkable genius and passionate spokesman for his homeland of East Bengal, Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi. Caudhurī's scholarly activities have had a tremendous impact on his part of South Asia and on the school led by

his ancestor Advaita. His family belongs to that lineage, and Caudhurī's guru's wishes seem to have shaped a significant portion of his productive life. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi has used the Advaita Ācārya texts in an attempt to recreate his branch of his religious tradition and to respond to polemical attacks from British rulers and Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century, but, most important, to construct a community whose unquestionable integrity and divine origins make them, in their own eyes, the most truly Vaiṣṇava of all; hence the title of this book: *Reconstructing Tradition.*

1

The Birth of an Image

Hagiography: The genre and Its Study

New religious movements are nearly always associated with the names of specific figures, many of whom continue to occupy positions of great respect even far beyond the boundaries of their own particular communities and times. From Buddhism and the Buddha to Christianity and Jesus to Islam and Muhammad to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and Joseph Smith, one individual is usually most closely associated with the religion's origin.

We know these names; we know their parents' names; we know, by and large, where and when they lived. But what do we really "know," empirically speaking, about their lives and innermost thoughts, or even their activities? We know what their biographers tell us about them. Those writers are themselves human beings living in and through time, with concerns dictated by the circumstances in which they find themselves and their religious community.

Religious believers around the world have been writing biographies of their founders and other leaders for centuries. Academic interest in hagiography, by contrast, dates only from the late nineteenth century, though religious professionals have been interested in this material for much longer.

Hagiography constitutes one part of the literature of many religious traditions. Doctrinal literature outlines the fundamentals of belief, but the lives of notable individuals often guide praxis, as those chosen to be memorialized exemplify some quality or qualities which their followers hope to emulate or commemorate. Both types of material have their purposes, and neither is value neutral. Those who create hagiography, like theologians, have a purpose in mind as they write.

Thus two writers with different priorities can present two very dissimilar portraits of the same subject. This project is in part an examination of those

differences and the reasons for them. It is also, more significantly, a study of how a community defines itself and of who may and who may not belong to that community.

Much of this material had previously been dismissed or simply not taken seriously (because of its synthesis of myth and history) by the academic community. Such scholarship arises not from any interest in glorifying one tradition to the detriment of others (as was the case with early academic endeavors in the field of religion) but rather from a desire to arrive at an understanding of how religion as a cultural phenomenon forms, evolves and functions within society. Over time scholars have come to realize that religious biography can be as much an index to the cultural phenomenon as other sectarian literature.

Hagiographers may simply be interested in preserving the name and activities of a person they admire; they may want to provide an example of behavior for their coreligionists to follow; they may want to raise theological issues too controversial to discuss more directly; they may have something important to say about their particular school through the words and deeds of their subject, to name but a few possibilities. Hagiography is a bidirectional literary type that is "not only shaped by its authors' circumstances but also aims to shape the future of the community."[1]

Three closely related factors interact with this bidirectionality in the creation of a religious biography. All three have both culture-specific features and elements that allow outsiders to recognize something significant in them. These are the notion of charisma, the long-established pattern of the hero story, which in this context I term "patterns of sainthood," and the idea of myth. These features interact in such complex ways that they are often inseparable. Hagiography as a genre crosses the boundaries between myth and reality and must have a charismatic subject. We will examine each of these elements separately, beginning with myth.

Myth

Wendy Doniger, who has written extensively on comparative mythology, describes myth as "a detailed history at once universal and personal, though it is, of course, a timeless history and hence hardly history at all in the usual sense of the word."[2] Notice that Doniger does not address the issue of the literal veracity of myth. Its empirical verifiability is simply not important, though hagiography does contain recognizable historical elements. It treats people and places we have heard of and moves with them through time. Peter Burke rather cynically claims that historians use the word *myth* to denote "stories that are not true, differentiated from 'history.'"[3] Myth does not have to be false, however. A more important characteristic of the genre is that it has a purpose; it captures deeply

held emotional messages of the culture that produces it. Malinowski described myths as "stories with social functions."[4] This fairly neutral description making myth a subset of story fits hagiography, for which one social function is often the justification of an institution. Much of the Advaita Ācārya material begins with this premise and adopts several others as well.

What other social functions does myth play in Indian culture more generally? One of the first places to look would be the great epics, to see what their status (and that of the purāṇic legends) is in the lives of ordinary people. G. N. Devy asserts that both educated and common people were well aware that the *Mahābhārata* was the first of these bodies to appear, and then the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and finally, the *Purāṇas*. But all of these works became so much a part of culture that they are considered extralinguistic, and their relative order of composition is of little interest to most people. They have ceased to be (if ever they were) mere texts. Neither these works nor the stories they contain can be constrained by any sense of time. Thus those who passed these materials from generation to generation did not view them as discrete historical texts, because they had become inseparable from the Indian "collective consciousness."[5]

Thus in the Indian context, as elsewhere, myths serve, among other purposes, to affirm the ideals of a given community. They tell gripping stories that an audience will not easily forget, in symbolic language that subtly yet unmistakably connects a given myth to its vision of the entire cosmos through the use of imagery that triggers the imagination to recall other mythological figures who behaved similarly in similar circumstances.

Mythological imagery features prominently in hagiographical literature as well, so that one person's mysterious birth or miraculous feats automatically recalls those persons previously established in social consciousness as divine or at least superhuman. In this way hagiography can be seen as disciplining (in the Foucauldian sense) its readers. Its authors use these images and other details to cue the readers and guide their thinking about the figures portrayed. These details thus serve to contain individual subjectivity, as they set the limits of imagination, albeit often very poetically. For as Rene Wellek and Austin Warren note, "For many writers, myth is the common denominator between poetry and religion. . . . Religious myth is the large-scale authorization of poetic metaphor."[6]

Patterns of Sainthood

In South Asian material the hero is usually even said to be a divine incarnation, and so his life story may be patterned after the mythological tale of the appropriate god. These tales so thoroughly pervade the culture that mere reference to their smallest detail will conjure up the entire mythological world in the

listener's mind. In this way the hero can be linked to that world without overt mention of the connection.

This subliminal linkage works in other aspects of the storytelling as well. A skillful author will use it not only in relating the activities of a subject's life but also in describing his personality and accomplishments.

The statement, for example, that a protagonist had memorized the vast Vedas by the age of three and mastered all the related literature within two subsequent years is enough to signal an audience that they are about to hear a marvelous tale of an extraordinary person. And because these associations are so deeply embedded within the consciousness of the culture, an author can use them to manipulate history. That is to say, if a writer wants to establish a particular person as a cultural, historical, or, more frequently, religious, icon, that writer can do so simply by asserting that certain stock events occurred at certain points in that person's life.

Charles S. J. White, writing in 1974, was perhaps the first to suggest this "distinctive developmental structure" in the life history of Indian saints.[7] White observed that

> in . . . Indian religions . . . when the deity appears most desirably human, and there is justification for it in the myth, "highly evolved" human beings come to be regarded as manifesting the divine nature in a particularly vivid way. This is the underlying factor in the broad picture of the Indian "saint" from the earliest period of which we have record.[8]

This notion of certain unusual mortals exhibiting various degrees of divinity is quite common in the devotional schools, particularly in the *saguṇī* schools where the mythology supports the idea of an appealing and approachable god.[9] The idea of divinity encased in human form may be tied to the social identity of a group. Charles White is quick to point out that one social class had long since staked out and institutionalized "the idea that the divine could inhabit the very leadership of the social hierarchy."[10] *Saguṇa* groups were composed almost entirely of brahmans, so perhaps this was simply a natural extension of what many already felt was their birthright.

While some religious biographies describe lives for believers to emulate, in many cases their subjects are not at all designed to serve as models. That is, as John Stratton Hawley suggests, religious biographies provide both paradigm (to be followed) and illustration (at which to marvel).[11] Hawley writes that because saints "exemplify something deeper than ordinary morality, they cannot always be expected to serve as examples for action in this world." [12] Many such figures are so lost in their own ecstasies that they cannot function in normal ways and

become entirely dependent on others for their care and feeding. Some, like the youthful Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya's close associate Nityānanda, behave in scandalous and culturally condemned ways that others should definitely not emulate. In all cases, however, these figures are very compelling in that they draw the attention of those around them to themselves, their conduct, and their activities.

Charisma

Religious leaders will not be successful if they cannot attract followers to their new movement, and so certainly holiness often includes at least a spark of charisma, the indefinable yet unmistakable quality of personal magnetism that attracts people, almost mystically, to its source. Charisma may be understood differently in different cultures, but those culturally determined signs associated with charisma indicate to others this link with the sacred. Once an individual is publicly acknowledged to have some sort of association with the divine, the community often begins to remember having noticed the signs in that person from an early age. This is a circular argument: in South Asia, where divinity is a very present concept, and many people fully expect to encounter one or more embodiments of that divinity at some point in their lives, everyone knows how to recognize it when it comes along. Any spiritual leader must have performed miracles (endured great physical suffering, etc.), and, conversely, a person who appears to have performed miracles is clearly a great religious leader and embodies at least some portion of divinity.

Biographers, in seeking to highlight and/or explain the magnetism of their founder to others, often enhance that founder's life story to bring it into greater conformance with notions already established within a given tradition of what constitutes holiness and how a person embodying it behaves. In South Asia "charisma is rarely associated with particular individuals, but is associated instead with social roles that persist beyond the lives of any of the incumbents."[13] And thus cultural anticipation of the possibility for the manifestation of charisma may lead to the perception among a believing community that their leader has performed extraordinary acts. "The interpretation of charisma is always couched in an idiom that has already been established as relating to the sacred."[14] As Nicholas Gier writes,

> devotees of great spiritual leaders have been led by some social-psychological reasons to attribute a certain set of characteristics and experiences to the nature and life of their masters. They have deified them with supernatural attributes; they have produced similar legends about their births and lives; and they have celebrated similar sacred rituals and sacraments in their names.[15]

Social Factors

Current studies of the genre of sacred biography are leading to greater understanding of how a sacred biographical image is constructed and the role of that image in the formation and development of a nascent religious community. I refer to the importance of examining the circumstances—political, historical, economic, sociological—that surround the creation of a text to arrive at an understanding of what external pressures might have spurred an author to produce the piece.

The subjects of most hagiographical literature are believed to be actual historical figures.[16] But, as previously mentioned, the genre occupies a very slippery continuum between history and myth, belonging fully to neither category. Providing a historically accurate account of the protagonist's life may be of less importance to a biographer than constructing an image to fit a desired ideal that will in turn serve a desired purpose. The stories are usually told in chronological order from birth to death like secular biographies, but the subjects are portrayed as possessed of divine inspiration for a particular mission for which they receive visions, and for the furthering of which they are either omniscient and/or can perform miracles. Consequently historical events may be exaggerated to make a more dramatic narrative statement. Sometimes an author augments the story with further details to emphasize the miraculous nature of an event. Similarly, tales may even be created by an author to fill in gaps in a biography or simply to demonstrate the protagonist's spiritual stature. And sometimes episodes from one person's biography are ascribed to another figure as a means to legitimate the latter in terms of the movement represented by the former or simply because the one paradigm will nicely make the point the second writer hopes to bring home. Even in medieval Christian hagiography "the substitution of motifs from other sacred biographies was viewed as an act of filial *pietas* and not one of literary theft."[17] Authors in many traditions frequently use such associations to establish a subject's piety. We will find numerous examples in the various works of the Advaita Ācārya corpus.

In the case of South Asian material biographical reconstruction from hagiography is impossible because of the absence of historical records, or of any nonsectarian sources, with which to confirm information provided by the sectarian biographical materials. Further, in South Asia little difference exists, at least traditionally, between the life of an individual as perceived by that individual and the cultural life model for that individual's social station.[18] The subject of religious biography must either uphold the cultural life model or demonstrate good cause for deviation from it. Both Advaita Ācārya and his primary wife Sītā Devī fulfilled

all the duties and behaviors expected of the high-caste brahmans they were *and* also did some things that would be considered transgressive, as we shall see.

Although hagiography presents the story of the life of an individual significant to a given religious community, it differs from secular biography in a number of important ways. Whereas the events in the life of, for example, an American political leader can and will be subject to exhaustive investigation to confirm their historicity, very rarely (at least in South Asia) can one find independent nonsectarian verification even for a subject's actual existence, let alone for the reported events of his or her life. Clearly something other than an interest in simple recitation of chronology is involved in the production of such material. What then is the purpose of its creation? Obviously the intention is not simply to record historical events, in the way scholars usually use that term, though the authors must show their subjects moving through historical time. The subjects of religious "biographies" are viewed by their followers as more than mere mortals, as beings of, literally, mythological proportions. But what happens to the community if it finds itself threatened in some way? What if its reputation becomes tarnished, its members subjected to public ridicule? What if it finds itself shrinking over time, and notices that few people outside the group know anything about its extraordinary founder? This study will pose the question of purpose to each of the works treating Advaita Ācārya and may find different answers for different hagiographies.

To summarize, the followers who create hagiography construct a biographical image for their subject that may reflect little of the historical reality of that person's life as lived. The lives of saints and other religious leaders may emphasize foibles to portray subjects as more human, or may emphasize, exaggerate, and multiply extraordinary traits to render those subjects more divine. Hagiography as a genre is historically ambivalent because its purposes extend beyond the purely biographical. It is difficult to sort the truly historical elements from the exaggerations and inventions added to enhance the narrative or the protagonist's stature. And yet the biographies must contain some historical components because the saint lived in and through time.

The Matter of Time

And so time itself is another complicated issue in the study of hagiography, for it does not always progress linearly, and it sometimes seems to fold over on itself when people who did not live at the same time meet and converse. And multiple times can overlap and coexist. Thus the notion of an eternal Vraja populated by Kṛṣṇa and all his family and friends, existing in another dimension while

mundane life continues in the here and now, presents Vaiṣṇavas with no sense of cognitive dissonance.

Paul Ricoeur described this temporal fluidity we find in sacred text as antihistorical.[19] Ricoeur was not speaking specifically of sacred biography, but his statement certainly applies to that genre of sacred text. Further, while such texts do contain some historical information, they clearly are not composed primarily to transmit historical data. This is particularly true in the South Asian case, as Charles Keyes has described:

> The Indian tradition of sacred biography, a tradition that includes the biographies of Kṛṣṇa and the Buddha, appears to have been, at least prior to the Mogul period, far less constrained by historical events in the lives of biographical subjects than has almost any other tradition of sacred biography known.[20]

Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps have most neatly captured the problem, with no specific cultural reference:

> Past events become less remote and more intimate when people invest them with a sense of engagement and concern for what lies ahead in the life course. The past is then pulled or "stretched" into the realm of present consciousness, including trepidation about the future. In this sense, the apprehended past still endures, still *is*. This face of human time is quintessentially nonlinear, in that past, present, and future are sensed holistically.[21]

Another temporal factor in hagiography is the distance between many writers and their subjects. Brigitte Cazelles points out that the subjects of Western hagiographers, for example, were usually distanced in both time and space from the authors and their readers. The New Testament Gospels were not written down until at least a full generation after the death of Christ. The situation in the case of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiography is only slightly different. The Vaiṣṇava composers are generally less distant from their subjects than were the Christian writers. Some of the authors of the Caitanya compositions had had little personal contact with Caitanya, although they were near contemporaries. Later, medieval European writers drew their subjects from the far more distant Latin tradition of writings on saints of the pagan Roman Empire or from fifth-century Egypt. The production of hagiography during the Middle Ages was seen as a devotional exercise with didactic intent. These writers often cited Latin sources because quoting an older, Latin text legitimized a later author's work.[22] The Gauḍīya writers also view their efforts as devotional exercises, and their frequent use of Sanskrit quotations serves roughly the same purpose as the European hagiographers' use

of Latin. Many authors cite (earlier) Sanskrit texts to support their arguments, or even compose their own material in Sanskrit as a technique to confer dignity and authority to that work.

Often legends of earlier saints, or earlier legends of a single saint, become models of what the fully realized, or enlightened, individual looks like. William Jackson observed that Tyāgarāja's life story grew in very particular archetypical directions over time, so that it seemed to echo dramatic events in the lives of previous saints. By showing that the same incidents occurred in Tyāgarāja's life, his hagiographers demonstrated that Tyāgarāja was, like his predecessors, fully realized.[23]

Allegory and Metaphor

Hagiography must uphold certain cultural norms. "What constitutes *the* correct biography will depend . . . not upon the faithfulness of the biography to the facts of a life, but on the authority with which a particular biography is backed."[24] What makes one text among several authoritative is that it either constitutes a representation of the sacred and/or has been ecclesiastically and/or secularly approved.[25] The genre has two tools its authors can use to move beyond those social expectations and covertly convey a perhaps very different message: allegory and metaphor.

The use of allegory can allow a writer to tell a story in such a way that only members of his own inner circle can comprehend. That is, the story will have a literal meaning on its surface and one or more other meanings veiled by allegory.[26] This technique allows for multiple levels of interpretation.

This issue will be quite familiar to those versed in the mysterious stories attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. These "parables" constitute a particular type of narrative that contain indications they are not to be understood literally,[27] meaning one thing to insiders and something else to outsiders.[28] Different Christians, both entire schools and individuals, have derived sometimes radically different meanings from the same stories, depending on their own agendas. We will certainly find multiple levels of interpretive possibility in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava material. While allegory is a part of the deliberate ambiguity, metaphor plays an even larger part.

Metaphor can be a useful apparatus through which to make sense of an entire body of work on a given subject. Individual compositions may appear to contradict each other until we examine them in a different way to see what kind of metaphorical entailments their authors have used, and what those metaphors tell us. Two linguists, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, discovered that metaphor pervades everyday language and thought and therefore becomes of central concern to understanding in any context. They reject the possibility of objec-

tive truth as key to a theory of meaning and instead rely on human experience and understanding as shaped by our use of metaphor.[29] Lakoff and Johnson have observed that the conceptual system through which we all think and act is primarily metaphorical in nature and therefore defines our everyday realities, despite the fact that most of us are unaware of this underlying framework to our daily lives.[30] In the material for this study metaphor conveys a great deal of information. We frequently see such images as "a flood of devotion," "the ocean of *saṁsāra*," etc. Emotions are described as natural phenomena (oceans and rivers). Individuals' positions in society, or within their religious movement, are described symbolically in ways that are transparent to members of their community. This imagery is important and carries further information, albeit quite subtle information, about a subject.

Metaphors are, however, culturally bound rather than universal, as Naomi Quinn, carrying the initial work of Lakoff and Johnson a bit further, and in part disagreeing with them, claims. "Particular metaphors are selected by speakers, just because they provide satisfying mappings onto already existing cultural understandings."[31] The significance, for example, of Kālīdāsa's evocative descriptions of creepers without trees will completely escape most North American readers at first pass. (Trees are men and creepers are the women who cling to them.)

These descriptions provide hints not only about a subject's role in the community but also about the authors' opinions of that subject's theological identity and position on the above-mentioned continuum of devotion. These hints often appear in metaphor and are rarely stated literally. An analysis of the metaphorical entailments of the seemingly contradictory images can help determine what coherence is to be found among the various authors' views. For example, the less approachable aspects of the divine are usually depicted with multiple limbs. When we see Sītā Devī in a four-armed form, for example, she is Lakṣmī, consort of Mahāviṣṇu. Kṛṣṇa and his favorite consort Rādhā are always depicted with two arms like ordinary mortals, because, the theology tells us, we can only truly love that which is like us. That is in part why it is difficult for a human being to develop a personal relationship with Mahāviṣṇu, but easy to develop one with the playful Kṛṣṇa.

Hagiography in South Asia

What South Asian hagiographic material preceded the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava works, and to what extent has this material shaped religious communities?

Hagiographical tradition in South Asia began with Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddha Carita*, probably composed during the first century C.E. We also find biographical fragments embedded in earlier Buddhist texts like the *Vinaya*, and scholarly

gleaning through such works has yielded quite a bit of information on the life of the Buddha. I am limiting this discussion, however, to specifically hagiographical compositions.

Aśvaghoṣa was only the first to describe the life of the Buddha. And although there have been numerous other biographies of the Buddha, Juliane Schober tells us, the notion held by such early Buddhist scholars as Erich Frauwallner (1898–1974) that there must have been an Ur-hagiography of Śākyamuni from which all subsequent versions were drawn is no longer widely accepted. Different schools in different geographical locations have produced their own biographies of the Buddha, entirely independently of each other. And the different circumstances of each of these groups are mirrored in their compositions, which reflect very different concerns in the qualities they attribute to the Buddha.[32]

Reginald Ray contends that the life of Śākyamuni Buddha constitutes the model for Buddhist sainthood.[33] Aśvaghoṣa provides the best example of this. His *Buddha Carita* covers the Buddha's entire life and thus sets up the paradigm for the model saint, "in whom is embodied an authentic humanity and a genuinely divine nature."[34] André Migot, however, has commented on the remarkable lack of individual personality to be found in the lives of the Buddhist saints. Rather, each one is depicted as a stereotyped image of one particular facet of the Buddha's personality, such that the entire entourage collectively embodies the Buddha's full personality.[35]

Buddhists also produced hagiographies of noteworthy early monks, which served not only to record these individuals' deeds (in hagiographical rather than any empirical historical form) but to provide models of piety and conduct for the community. Until fairly recently this group of Buddhist works has largely been ignored. Reginald Ray, apparently somewhat puzzled by the lack of scholarly attention paid to these materials, describes five different types of Buddhist saints whose hagiographies remain extant, nearly all of whom were present at the genesis of Buddhism.[36] He notes that they "were being used to construct an overall picture of Indian Buddhism, but one in which, ironically, they were given little role to play."[37] Juliane Schober reports that Buddhist sacred biographies have played key roles in the situating and legitimating of local Buddhist groups,[38] which have often arisen as the result of one individual's example and proselytizing.

Jainas have also produced hagiographical material, though most of their works appeared significantly later than the Buddhist material. The *Bhaktāmara Stotram*, composed shortly before 1000 C.E., is a lengthy composition in praise of Ṛṣabha, the first of the Jaina *tīrthaṅkaras*.[39] Ṛṣabha's historicity is questionable, but for Jainas, who consider him their spiritual ancestor, he was very real.

The *Kalpa Sūtras* treat the lives of the last two Jaina *tīrthaṅkaras*, Parśvanātha and Mahāvīra, neither of whose historical existence is in question. The *Kalpa*

Sūtras were written over a lengthy period beginning possibly in the tenth century, though most appear to date from the fourteenth through the mid sixteenth centuries. Medieval Jaina biographies, the *paṭṭāvalis*, are lineage histories whose major purpose was simply to legitimate a given line of monks.[40] We also find extensive stories of the lives of both Jaina and Buddhist monastics.

While Buddhist and Jaina hagiographies are numerous in South Asia, writers in other groups were also very productive in the genre. In South India we find texts treating the life of the eighth-century monist Śaṅkara and of the many devotional leaders and other saints of the medieval period. Cekkilar's *Periya Purāṇam*, composed mid twelfth century, is the authoritative account of the lives of the sixty-three Nāyanārs, the Tamil Śaiva saints. These saints are presumed to have lived during the period from the sixth century through the early eighth century.[41] Vidya Dehejia and Dennis Hudson have also studied and reported on South Indian hagiographical material. A. K. Ramanujan cites other southern biographies, including the *Śivaśaraṇakathāratnakośa* (Encyclopedia of Vīraśaiva Saints), a Kannada compendium, and the Tamil version of the *Śrī Mahābhativijayam*, which treats Vaiṣṇava saints.

Moving temporally closer to the period with which this book is concerned, writers in the northwest also contributed to the vast storehouse of Indian hagiography. The Sikh material begins with the *janam-sākhīs*, anecdotal tales from the life of Guru Nanak (c. 1469–1539), which are usually told in roughly chronological order like a historical biography. The other nine gurus have also been immortalized in both formal literature and in popular memory.

Turning now to the devotional traditions, the Rāmānandīs played a key role in the development of hagiography during the medieval period. Nābhadās composed his *Bhaktamālā* ("garland of [Vaiṣṇava] devotees"), a collection of short biographical sketches of leaders among the *bhakti* community, around 1600 C.E. Anantadās wrote his *parachaīs*, narrative hagiographical poems on some of the major *nirguṇī* saints, around the same time. About a century later Priyādās expanded some of Nābhadās's verses on the more important figures into full hagiographies.[42]

Hagiography was also prominent in Indian Islam, especially in literature treating Sufis. Biographical dictionaries of Sufi saints began appearing (in Persian) in India in the late sixteenth century, compiled under imperial patronage.[43] We find lives of Sufi *shaykhs* and *pirs* as well, including the semibiographical collections of aphorisms known as the *malfūzāt*, recorded by disciples of Sufi leaders. These collections proliferated from the mid fourteenth century in the Deccan through the next two centuries.[44] The Chistiya school also produced many lives of their leaders, as Bruce Lawrence has documented. Ernst and Lawrence point out that "more Persian Sufi hagiographical literature was produced in India than

in all of Persia and Central Asia combined."[45] Even the Mughal prince Dara Shikuh produced a dictionary at the young age of twenty-four; his *Safinat al-awiya* (Ship of Saints) includes brief entries on over four hundred Sufi saints.[46]

Within South Asia the region of Bengal has given birth to a disproportionately large number of such luminaries, including Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Ram Mohan Roy, and Paramahamsa Ramakrishna. Each of these men[47] brought a significant new mode of expression to the Bengali religious scene, and each has become well-known outside his own community.

Even prior to the Sufi material, Bengali hagiographical literature began appearing, as early as the late fifteenth century, as a tool for establishing the authority and identity of sectarian leaders. This was a very prolific period of hagiographical production in South Asia, but particularly in the eastern region, as devotees of the new Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement began creating biographies of their founder, Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, a householder who became a renunciate in his mid-twenties, advocated an unorthodox brand of ecstatic devotion to Kṛṣṇa as the supreme god, which he is said to have claimed could lead anyone, regardless of caste or sex, to salvation.

Hagiography in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

The delta region of Bengal witnessed a tremendous flood of religious expression in the late medieval period, springing from all levels of its very stratified society.

Navadvīpa, a small town some ninety kilometers north of modern Kolkata,[48] was the capital of Bengal at the time of the Turkish incursion (early thirteenth century), and became, along with Kumārhaṭṭa, Shantipur, and Bhāṭpārā, one of four regional centers of brahmanical learning. The local (Muslim) rulers gave land grants and monetary support to brahman teachers for their own maintenance and that of their young (brahman) students. This royal patronage attracted many brahman families to the area for the sake of their sons' education[49] and may have triggered the small migration from the Sylhet area in which both Advaita's and Caitanya's families took part.

Navadvīpa was the headquarters for an active school of *navya nyāya* (logic) firmly rooted in ancient Sanskrit brahmanical tradition. Perhaps far older were the several Śākta schools, whose adherents sought salvation at the feet of a supreme goddess. Śākta worship often involves *tantra*—a mysterious catchphrase for a collection of practices through which the devotee seeks to harness the senses and their vehicles, redirecting them in an involutionary way to lead him (for most texts are written from the male perspective) to liberation within the body.

In the late fifteenth century a new, emotion-driven devotion to Viṣṇu in his various forms, already a strong force in the South, appeared in North India.

This movement took firm hold in the already rich Bengali environment, where it was introduced by a young brahman scholar named Viśvambhara Miśra but better known by his monastic title of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. In very brief summary, Viśvambhara underwent some sort of conversion experience while in the pilgrimage town of Gayā to perform his father's funeral rites. From then on he would frequently fall into ecstatic trances[50] during which he would cry out, almost painfully, according to witnesses, for his lord, Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, or Caitanya, as he is usually called, continued on from Gayā to travel around India on a grand pilgrimage tour (see map, chapter 6). When he returned home to Nadīyā he began to propound a new brand of Vaiṣṇavism for people at every level of society, insisting that one no longer needed to be born a brahman male or devote years to scriptural study to achieve spiritual success. Caitanya had become completely devoted to Kṛṣṇa, to Svayam Bhagavān (the Lord Himself), whom he believed was no mere incarnation of Viṣṇu but rather the source of all *avatāras*, the Ultimate Reality. According to this new faith, the mere chanting of the Lord's name was enough to confer salvation—"salvation" now meaning "eternal service of the Lord in His heavenly realm."

Kṛṣṇa Caitanya's followers soon identified him first as Kṛṣṇa Himself, and eventually as the dual incarnation of both Kṛṣṇa and his favorite lover Rādhā. Caitanya's followers began worshipping their leader as a divine incarnation even during his lifetime, although he seems not to have encouraged such adulation.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community continued to develop after the death of Caitanya. Minority voices within the group began to make themselves heard, and so various leaders sought to define both their group and membership within that group. Caitanya had earlier directed the cousins Jīva and Rūpa Gosvāmin to codify his theological message; scores of others wrote lyric poetry in praise of Kṛṣṇa and/or Caitanya, and still others produced biographical material on the movement's founder. Caitanya's followers produced several hagiographies, the most important of which, with their approximate dates of composition and the abbreviations by which I will refer to them hereafter, are as follows:

1. Murārī Gupta, *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (KCC) (c. 1535)
2. Vṛndāvana Dāsa, *Caitanya Bhāgavata* (CBh) (c. 1560?)
3. Kavi Karṇapūra, *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛtam Mahākāvyam* (KCCM) (c. 1560)
4. Kavi Karṇapūra, *Caitanya Candrodaya Nāṭakam* (CCN) (c. 1580?)
5. Jayānanda Miśra, *Caitanya Maṅgala* (CCM-1) (c. 1600)
6. Locana Dāsa, *Caitanya Maṅgala* (CCM-2) (c. 1600)
7. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (CC) (1615)

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism does not, nor has it ever, had a formal institutional structure with a central authority. It has no pope or *śaṅkarācārya* at its head to dictate position papers backed by his own infallibility as the mouthpiece of God. Rather we find a collection of subsects, each led by a guru who is either hereditary (in the case of householder lineages) or appointed, usually by his predecessor, with each group engaging, generally speaking, in the same devotional practices.

Even in its infancy the movement had no absolute ruler. Caitanya as the complete incarnation of divinity was clearly the most important figure, but others around him also embodied aspects of divinity and were understood to be partial or lesser incarnations of Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇa does choose to appear among mortals, he brings along the entire entourage of his eternal Vraja appearance. He sends his parents and other elders first, and then that generation in turn gives birth to Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, and all their friends.

According to Kavi Karṇapūra, Kṛṣṇa sent all of his family members and companions to the earthly Vraja[51] of Bengal to make ready for his own eventual advent. This process of serial incarnation took more than a full generation to effect. By the time Caitanya was ready to begin his own mission, four particularly close associates shared his vision. These, plus Caitanya himself, are identified collectively as the *pañcatattva*—the fivefold truth, the five essentials, the five pillars of Vaiṣṇava faith—and are celebrated in a simple verse used in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotional services:

> *Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Prabhu Nityānanda,*
> *Jaya Advaita, Gadādhara, Śrīvāsādigaurabhaktavṛndā*
>
> [Victory to the glorious Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, to the lord Nityānanda,
> Victory to Advaita, to Gadādhara, and to Śrīvāsa and all the
> other devotees]

These five pillars are Caitanya himself, Nityānanda, Advaita, Gadādhara, and Śrīvāsa (sometimes called Śrīnivāsa). Advaita and Śrīvāsa were quite a bit older than the other three, who were close in age.

This notion of *pañcatattva* is attributed to Svarūpa Dāmodara[52] and first seen in Kavi Karṇapūra's *Gauragaṇoddeśa Dīpikā* (GGUD). Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja later elaborates the doctrine in the CC, 1.5–1.7.31. In GGUD, verse 13, Karṇapūra says,

> Nanda's darling Kṛṣṇa himself is Gauracandra, the Fair Moon, who has taken on the appearance of his own devotee;
> Halāyudha (Balarāma) in Vraja is Nityānanda, whose nature is that of a devotee;

Sadāśiva[53] is the scholar Advaita, who is devotion incarnate;
Śrīnivāsa heads the rest of the devotees with the form of a devotee;
The scholar Gadādhara, best of brahmans, is the *Śakti*[54] of a devotee.[55]

The distinctions among the five may seem slim, and even simple wordplay, but are extremely important to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. Each of the five was an exemplary devotee in the specific way described. Caitanya constituted the totality of devotion, with each of the others symbolically constituting one of his arms. This schema gives us a four-armed Caitanya, and such a nonhuman divine form arouses awe rather than loving devotion, according to Gauḍīya theology. This was the entry point through which Caitanya would lead his followers into intimate relationships with their lord. And thus his four arms, his four deputies, enable him, through them, to carry out his mission of spreading devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

Not coincidentally, the other four also led groups in the first generation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Their inclusion in this important *pañcatattva* configuration thus delineates the entire movement as a collection of smaller groups with no hierarchical relationship to each other. But relationships among these groups were not always harmonious, and as is often the case following the death of a charismatic founder, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community splintered, and had already been showing signs of factionalism even during Caitanya's last years in Puri. Eventually each subsect produced materials on its own leaders, with hagiography treating Advaita Ācārya appearing first. The primary purpose of this material seems to have been to emphasize the integrity and social purity of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism from its inception and to maintain Advaita's role as the godfather of the new school. Secondarily, this work suggests that his community had recognized Advaita as a leading citizen long before Caitanya's mission began.

In discussing Advaita Ācārya and his historical legacy, we are clearly talking about two separate but not entirely distinct sectarian identities. First of all, the entire Caitanya Vaiṣṇava movement owes its existence, and freely admits this, to Advaita Ācārya. But Advaita Ācārya was himself leader of one particular branch of Caitanya's sectarian tree, and that branch too has its own limbs and its own history.

No leader of this first generation of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community, aside from Caitanya himself, inspired a profusion of hagiography except Advaita Ācārya. Some material on Nityānanda eventually appeared, but little or nothing on the other leaders beyond what had already been said about them in the Caitanya corpus.

Before we explore what Advaita Ācārya's own followers had to say about him, let us briefly refer to his image in the Caitanya corpus. This will help develop a sense of Advaita's position in the larger movement.

Advaita Ācārya in the Caitanya Corpus

What image of Advaita Ācārya do the biographers of Caitanya create? As mentioned above, the biographies of Caitanya uniformly describe Advaita Ācārya as the instrumental cause for Kṛṣṇa's incarnation in the Kali Yuga as Caitanya. But what else do these authors tell us about him?

A very brief summary of some of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology will help clarify this section. At its core is the notion that Viṣṇu appears on earth at least once in every age at times when injustice and unrighteousness threaten to prevail. Different Vaiṣṇava schools in South Asia have posited different lists of specific descents, or *avatāras*, of Viṣṇu, but all include Kṛṣṇa.[56] The Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is well-known outside of India, and perhaps that text first suggests that Kṛṣṇa is himself the Supreme Being, Ultimate Reality. Certainly the *Bhagavad Gītā* is the first composition in which we see a devotee involved in a personal relationship with the divine.[57] That idea of cultivating a personal relationship with the object of one's devotion is key to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. Arjuna, warrior-hero of the *Gītā*, regarded Kṛṣṇa as his best friend. Other sanctioned relationships with the divine, as discussed previously,[58] are parent-child, master-servant, and, the most intimate, lover-beloved.

Kṛṣṇa's devotees are particularly fond of him at two stages of his life: his early childhood and his playboy adolescence. The adorable child Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, born a prince but fostered out to a cowherd couple, comes to prominence with the revival of devotionalism all across the subcontinent in the medieval period. The most important Vaiṣṇava text treating Kṛṣṇa's life (and other incarnations) is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.[59] The tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* brings Kṛṣṇa into his adolescence and his erotic play with the young women of the community.

The twelfth-century poet Jayadeva in his *Gīta Govinda*, a Sanskrit composition, expands the Kṛṣṇa story and gives him one particular consort among the many: Rādhā, who becomes the most important of his thousands of adoring partners. Jayadeva skillfully portrays all the emotions of a romantic relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, from the earliest twinges of simultaneous anticipation and hesitation to the joys of loveplay, the anxieties of awaiting the lover's arrival, and the discovery of his unfaithfulness.

Baru Caṇḍīdāsa's *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtana*, the only surviving pre-Caitanya Vaiṣṇava text in Bengali on the same Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme,[160] presents a much more self-confident and even audacious Rādhā than her counterpart in Jayadeva's work. This text has often been deemed the most frankly erotic piece of Bengali literature yet produced. Caṇḍīdāsa's Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa were a Bengali couple trysting on the lush green riverbanks of eastern India, and Caitanya is said to have en-

joyed these verses. Perhaps Caṇḍīdāsa influenced Advaita to consider the possibility of Kṛṣṇa's actually appearing right there in Nadīyā District.

These tremendously popular literary works provided the template for the type of relationship with the divine the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas came to privilege over all others. The relationship of lovers is the most intimate of human relationships, and that of illicit lovers is the most fraught with risk. The devotee's longing for Kṛṣṇa should be so fierce that he or she is willing to risk the loss of everything—family, pride, honor—for the chance to be near Kṛṣṇa, just like those cowherd women sneaking away from their husbands' beds at night for a tryst with Kṛṣṇa.

The Gauḍīyas also developed the idea that Kṛṣṇa can incarnate partially and serially. He can send portions of himself to earth, in which case he may send a series of increasingly large portions, until finally he appears himself, fully. These multiple manifestations in no way diminish their source, for there are no limits to what Kṛṣṇa can do, nor is he, or his power, ever reduced in any way.

Each of the works to treat Caitanya presents a different theological construction of Caitanya's identity, which I will summarize in the sections following.[61] Similarly, Advaita's hagiographers offer a number of different theological identities for their protagonist, as we will explore in subsequent chapters. Wherever Advaita is mentioned in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature—and he is mentioned frequently—he is described as the respected teacher his name (Master of Nondualism) proclaims. This status is never called into question. However, one must ask what the Master of Nondualism is doing as the herald of a new and most definitely dualistic religious movement. The tradition speculates at great length about the significance of this name. Literally, *a-dvaita* means "nondualism." The assumption is that he had been a teacher of *advaita vedānta,* at least until Caitanya's mission began. His name is a title rather than the name his parents gave him, and he earned it through his tremendous erudition. His background makes it clear that Advaita was an accomplished scholar, educated in all the traditional brahmanical literature, so quite likely he was literally a master of monism. But this of course was troublesome for the Gauḍīyas, who must tweak the name to derive a more acceptable etymology from it. One such reading is simply "nondifferent (from Kṛṣṇa)."

Let us now consider Advaita's treatment in each of the major works of the Caitanya hagiographical literature, before turning, in the next chapter, to the corpus dedicated to Advaita.

Murārī Gupta's *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya-Caritāmṛta* (KCC)

Murārī Gupta composed his Sanskrit *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya-Caritāmṛta,* the earliest composition dedicated to the life of Caitanya, either during, or very shortly af-

ter, Caitanya's lifetime. In Murārī's work anyone in any way constituted from a divine being behaves accordingly, and consequently Murārī focuses on the personalities and characters of the *pañcatattva*, the five main pioneers of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement (Caitanya, Nityānanda, Advaita, Gadādhara and Śrīvāsa, as discussed above),[62] presenting each of them as forms of the Lord.[63]

Murārī posits Caitanya as a part[64] of Viṣṇu, an image the Gauḍīya community eventually moved away from. He describes Caitanya as the descent of an innate part of Viṣṇu as, he says, are the surrounding devotees. These parts descend sequentially, beginning with Mādhavendra Purī, from whom splits off a second part, becoming Advaita Ācārya.[65] Mādhavendra Purī is a shadowy figure in the background of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. His name is frequently mentioned but we have little knowledge about his origins and theological stance. This void has resulted in some speculation about these questions.

Mādhavendra was most likely from South India, where the current wave of devotionalism had its beginning.[66] The title *Purī* tells us that he belonged to one of the reorganized *swāmī* orders. Gauḍīya historians have connected their school with Madhva's dualistic school of Vaiṣṇavism, but *swāmīs* in that lineage use the monastic title *Tīrtha*, not *Purī*. Perhaps, as Friedhelm Hardy suggests,[67] the similarity of Mādhavendra's name to Madhva's led to this false association. Whatever Mādhavendra Purī's original sectarian affiliation, his murky history only helps to cloud Advaita's early philosophical inclinations. He does, however, provide an important link between the monastic nondualism preached by the eighth-century philosopher Śaṅkara[68] and the dualistic devotional traditions. He probably died before Caitanya was born but is generally understood to have been Advaita Ācārya's guru and largely responsible for Advaita's own spiritual directions, as Murārī's image of Advaita physically splitting off from Mādhavendra suggests.

In the mythology of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*, it is usually the ubiquitous sage Nārada who travels to Vaikuṇṭha to persuade Kṛṣṇa to take birth on earth to remedy some critical situation. Murārī and subsequent Caitanya biographers, however, break with tradition to credit Advaita Ācārya with this feat, and associate Advaita not with the mythological sage[69] but with (in the KCC) Hari (Kṛṣṇa). Murārī clearly thought very highly of Advaita Ācārya and his erudition, and portrays him as a model sage, perhaps in this way still connecting him, at least by profession, with Nārada.

Murārī also, however, clearly portrays Advaita Ācārya as a man of great devotion, though he usually does so obliquely. Devotion and erudition are usually considered two very different paths to liberation—two paths that do not intersect. And, for the Gauḍīyas, devotion is far superior to what they term "dry scholarship." Murārī joins these two paths in the person of Advaita Ācārya. In

2.5.7, for example, Advaita proclaims, "May those dolts who say that there is no *bhakti* on the earth in this Kali Age, open their eyes!"[70]

Vṛndāvana Dāsa's *Caitanya Bhāgavata* (CBh)

Vṛndāvana Dāsa's *Caitanya Bhāgavata* is the earliest of the Bengali-language materials treating Caitanya and easily the most popular. This longest of all the biographies makes frequent mention of Advaita, usually with the epithet *siṅha mahāmati,* "the great lion," because of his reputation for storming heaven with ferocious roars to attract Kṛṣṇa's attention.

Vṛndāvana Dāsa proclaims that Kṛṣṇa's devotees are to be worshipped with the same devotion accorded Kṛṣṇa, and specifically names first Nityānanda and then Advaita Ācārya as among those worthy of such reverence. The author identifies Advaita first through his relationship with Caitanya and then through his relationship with Nityānanda. In 2.19.218 and elsewhere he says that Advaita is nondifferent (making the common pun on Advaita's name) from Caitanya, but he clearly places him in a position of less importance than he grants to Nityānanda. Vṛndāvana Dāsa agrees with Murārī Gupta that Advaita's primary importance lies in his role as the real agent responsible for Caitanya's *avatāra*ship:

> Tell the story of Advaita Ācārya; this incarnation of mine is due to that bald man.
> That bald man brought me from Heaven![71]

Vṛndāvana Dāsa reports that Advaita perceived the world to be in a sorry condition because of the lack of devotion (*bhakti*) and resolved to bring in the *avatāra* for the current age to remedy the situation. At least eleven times in the text, as well as in the introduction, the author reveals his view of Caitanya as Mahāviṣṇu. In the standard purāṇic mythology, Viṣṇu sleeps, in between ages of creation, on a "bed"—the body of a many-headed serpent called Ananta ("infinite")—that floats on the primeval ocean of milk.

In Vṛndāvana Dāsa's text Caitanya says that Advaita Ācārya's roar awakened him from that cosmic sleep and made him aware of the need for a new dharma on earth.[72] Clearly the author is creating an image of Caitanya as embodying the majestic nature of divinity.

Since it is Advaita who has called in the *avatāra,* it follows that he is the one to proclaim His presence publicly, which he does when he worships him in Śrīvāsa's courtyard, shortly after Caitanya has physically manifested his divinity to the older man.[73]

While Vṛndāvana Dāsa places Advaita slightly below Nityānanda in sectarian hierarchy, nevertheless he also says that Advaita and Nityānanda are a single image in two parts[74] and that they comprise the two arms of Caitanya.[75] He seems to be taking pains to tell his readers that one should not consider one of the two men superior to the other. Hindsight suggests that he was trying to downplay the significance of the apparently frequent quarrels between them, or at least between their followers, for he also comments on their differences, saying that their quarrels are not entirely what they seem:[76]

> The name-calling between Nityānanda and Advaita is their great delight. If (only) people would understand it![77]

Elsewhere we are told that Advaita is only Śiva,[78] and Caitanya refers to him as the "embodiment of Śiva."[79] Uniquely, Vṛndāvana Dāsa also posits Advaita as Agni, god of fire, who metes out punishment to all detractors of the Vaiṣṇavas.

Kavi Karṇapūra' s *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya-Candrodaya-Nāṭakaṁ* (KCCN)

Kavi Karṇapūra's *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya-Candrodaya-Nāṭakaṁ* is highly indebted to Murārī Gupta's earlier composition. Karṇapūra and Murārī are the only two of the biographers who actually had any interaction with Caitanya during his lifetime, and, even so, Karṇapūra was only a small child when Caitanya died, so his own impressions at the time would probably not have been very sophisticated. Karṇapūra is one of the most prolific of the Vaiṣṇava writers, having produced such diverse materials as the two biographical works on Caitanya discussed herein as well as the *Gauragaṇoddeśa Dīpikā* (1576), the *Ānanda Vṛndāvana Campū* (a mixed prose-verse composition, "The Vṛndāvana of Delight"), the *Kṛṣṇāhnika Kaumudī* ("The Elucidation of the Daily Worship of Kṛṣṇa"), and the *Alaṁkāra Kaustubha* ("The Jewel of Rhetoric").

Karṇapūra usually refers to Advaita by his given name of Kamalākṣa rather than by his title of Advaita, and clearly places him within the inner circle of Caitanya's devotees. It would seem that Karṇapūra is trying to ignore the possibility of prior mastery of nondualism having any impact whatsoever on Advaita's Vaiṣṇavism. He states that that inner circle is of great significance in terms of the purpose of Caitanya's descent, and identifies each member as a specific incarnation as related to Caitanya. In chapter 7, for example, he has Nityānanda describe the elder Advaita as follows:

> He who is famous on the earth by the name of Rudra-Śiva is present now as Kamalākṣa.

And goes on to say,

> and thus did the devotees cast their gaze upon the Brahman-*avatāra, Kamalākṣa.*[80]

He also identifies Advaita as Śiva, specifically, as Girīśa, Lord of the Mountains,[81] and later in the text Sarvabhauma[82] calls him "Maheśa the Great Lord in the form of a *mahātmā*, a great-souled one. "[83] Karṇapūra depicts Advaita as the scholar turned devotee; in other words, he tells us that Śiva the ascetic yogi is Hari's devotee. He is elaborating here on his earlier formulation in verse 13 of GGUD, cited above.

Jayānanda's *Caitanya-Maṅgala* (CM–1)

Jayānanda seems to have very little to say about Advaita Ācārya in his *Caitanya-Maṅgala.* We get some clue about the author's views, however, in Jayānanda's description of the incarnation of the entire *dhāman,* the realm, of Kṛṣṇa from heavenly Vraja to the earthly Vraja of Nadīyā. Jayānanda has this realm descend to earth in stages and mentions, for example, that Advaita's parents were Daśaratha and Kausalyā, born as Mādhavānanda and Labhyamatī.[84] This would seem to indicate that Advaita is closely connected to Kṛṣṇa, since Daśaratha and Kausalyā were the parents of the previous incarnation, Rāma. And Rāma came to earth before Kṛṣṇa, just as Advaita's advent preceded Caitanya's.

Karṇapūra's *Caitanya-Candrodaya-Nāṭakam* (CCN)

Karṇapūra was an extremely prolific writer, and, in addition to the works already mentioned (and several others), he also produced a dramatic work in ten acts, the *Caitanya-Candrodaya-Nāṭakam.* In this play he sets out the relative positions of the main devotees, using the familiar South Asian metaphor of the wish-fulfilling tree. Karṇapūra says that Advaita comprises the sprouts of this tree.[85] Later, he has the goddess Kālī posit Advaita as both Viṣṇu and Śiva, when she says, in part,

> [There appeared] in the flesh, the most excellent Advaita Ācārya,
> not less than the Lord Viṣṇu, with the body of Śiva.[86]

Locana Dāsa's *Caitanya-Maṅgala* (CM–2)

Locana Dāsa in his *Caitanya-Maṅgala* was the first author to introduce an emphasis on the erotic sweetness so critical to later Gauḍīya theology. In a lengthy

story he follows the standard imagery of Nārada's convincing Kṛṣṇa to take birth on earth, and closely follows Murārī's text. Locana has little to say about Advaita Ācārya but accepts his position as propounded in the *Gauragaṇoddeśa Dīpikā* described above.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (CC)

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja manages to mesh biography with theology in his massive CC, thereby completing the Caitanya biographical tradition.[87] By using the title of the very first of Caitanya's biographies, he supersedes that earlier (Sanskrit) work. Kṛṣṇadāsa draws liberally from previous writers (poets and theologians as well as biographers) in composing and compiling his own text, sanctioning the views of those authors he chooses to include and condemning those he ignores to sectarian oblivion.[88] Despite various differences among the Caitanya biographies, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition considers the *Caritāmṛta* the truest embodiment of the "nectar of the life of Caitanya," as its title can be translated.

This life of Caitanya devotes much of an entire chapter (1.6) to Advaita Ācārya, describing him first as a limb of Mahāviṣṇu.[89] Kṛṣṇadāsa states repeatedly[90] that Advaita called Kṛṣṇa down to earth. And he, like Karṇapūra, uses the tree metaphor to describe the relative places of the various members of the inner circle (the *pañcatattva*), who will head the four most important lineages and their followers. In this schema Advaita's clan is given second place, after Nityānanda's group.[91]

In five separate passages of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja describes Advaita's summoning of Kṛṣṇa:

> Ācārya Gosvāmī is the *bhakta-avatāra* of Prabhu; his call was the cause of Kṛṣṇa's *avatāra*.[92]

In the passage following (1.3.76–91) the poet describes Advaita's dismay at the state of the world, bereft of devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Full of compassion, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja reports, Advaita thought about what he could do to help. He decided that if Kṛṣṇa himself could be persuaded to appear, he could spread devotion himself among the people. Advaita resolved to worship Kṛṣṇa unceasingly to force him to take birth and finally Kṛṣṇa responded and incarnated himself. Advaita is described as the primary cause for Caitanya's incarnation (1.3.89) because his fierce cries attracted Kṛṣṇa (1.4.5).

Two chapters later the poet reiterates

> Advaita Ācārya, because of whose tulasi-water, because of whose shouts, Caitanya incarnated with his associates, through whom Prabhu spread *kīrtana*,

> through whom Prabhu rescued the world, is Īśvara's partial incarnation; his teaching is the virtue of the name—a marvel to all.
>
> . . .
>
> That master scholar is Caitanya's right hand. The majesty of that revered man, whose shout caused Caitanya to incarnate, is unparalleled.[93]

Advaita Ācārya was very much a presence in the Caitanya hagiographies, always in the forefront of any activities and always named in the same breath as Caitanya and Nityānanda. Clearly his name was in no danger of being forgotten and his place in the entire Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement was assured. Why then did his followers feel a need to produce more works treating this man? Advaita's followers were attempting to define themselves clearly as a unique group against that greater contextual backdrop in order to accomplish their aim. They sought to stress their separation from Nityānanda and his followers—even perhaps from Caitanya. Why was this necessary?

Nityānanda, the *avadhūta*, was a wild-eyed iconoclast with no respect for social convention. His devotion took a very different form than did Advaita's, and he garnered, and still has, a tremendous following. Advaita was a caste-sensitive brahman, always careful to observe the relevant rules and restrictions. The few exceptions prove the case, as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

In the first stage of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement the presence of an established and elderly scholar in its midst provided the group with respectability. The loud ecstatic *kīrtana* processions Caitanya led through the streets of Navadvīpa at all hours of the day and night hardly seemed models of priestly decorum. Further, in addition to the status conferred by the simple fact of his age, Advaita Ācārya as a recognized exponent of orthodox brahmanism linked the new movement with that tradition. However, it seems unlikely that a young Caitanya, if he were as lost in religious ecstasy as the hagiographies would have us believe, would have conceived of the idea of including his parents' elderly friend in his *saṅkīrtana* simply for political expedience. Perhaps Advaita was indeed swept along in the devotional fervor or joined in out of affection for his former pupil. Every text to describe these processions (as well as the iconography) mentions that Advaita Ācārya was always next to Caitanya at the very front, so this notion is certainly not a strategic afterthought on the part of Advaita's followers.

Despite the clearly essential role he played, Advaita occupies little verse space in the Caitanya hagiographical texts aside from that devoted to his role in Caitanya's advent and subsequent activities with Caitanya. Very little information about Advaita Ācārya's own life independent of Caitanya appears in the Cait-

anya corpus. Nevertheless, Advaita attracted many followers of his own during the course of his career, including most of his sons and grandsons. We know that his leadership was recognized by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community as a whole because Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja describes him as one of the two "main branches" (the other being Nityānanda) of the "tree of devotion *(bhakti)*," in CC 1.9, and lists Advaita's disciples in the verses following. In fact chapter 6 of CC *Adīlīlā* is entirely devoted to Advaita Ācārya.

Many of the Gauḍīya biographies contain descriptions of quarrels between factions of Caitanya's devotees, particularly between Advaita and Nityānanda, and their respective followers. Nityānanda's branch is listed first in the CC, ahead of Advaita's, indicating that Nityānanda had more followers than Advaita and, at the time the CC was composed, was considered more important. Vṛndāvana Dāsa repeatedly makes mention of friction between Advaita and Nityānanda in his CBh and dismisses it as mere friendly rivalry.

Nityānanda was an important figure and usually given at least equal status with Advaita. The triumvirate of Caitanya, Advaita Ācārya, and Nityānanda worked together, yet in very distinctly different ways, to advance their mutual cause. Nityānanda was slightly older than Caitanya and died soon after Caitanya's death. He is usually described as mad with devotion, often to the point of ignoring the usual conventions governing public behavior. He certainly did not observe the strictures of brahmanical society. Despite his obvious importance, he merited little hagiographical literature of his own. The secondary literature contends that Nityānanda's life was thoroughly covered in the Caitanya corpus, so separate biographies were not necessary.[94] Advaita, on the other hand, had already lived for fifty years before Caitanya was born and outlived the younger man by perhaps twenty-five years; much more remained of his life to document. Those fifty-odd years of his life that coincided with Caitanya's are indeed described and discussed in the Caitanya hagiographical material, allowing us to see what Caitanya's devotees thought and felt about their elder statesman.

To review what the Caitanya biographers say about Advaita Ācārya, Murārī presents each of the *pañcatattva* as a form of the Lord. Advaita Ācārya is here a secondary *aṁśa* of Hari, via Mādhavendra Purī. Advaita is thus connected to the *advaita* tradition through his guru.

Vṛndāvana Dāsa is the first to connect Advaita with Śiva, an association that persists throughout the literature (except in Jayānanda's *Caitanya-Maṅgala*). Śiva is most often viewed as the imperturbable yogi, the ascetic on the mountain top, quietly withdrawn into himself and meditating upon the divine. And it is this nondualistic yogi who summons Kṛṣṇa to earth to inaugurate the new

(and dualistic) form of devotional worship. Śiva is calm and staid, the "establishment" figure. The association with Śiva is particularly interesting for this figure who forms the backdrop for the unrestrained expressions of devotion Caitanya extols.

Jayānanda posits Advaita as Rāma to Caitanya's Kṛṣṇa. Rāma appears chronologically earlier in the list of *avatāras* than does Kṛṣṇa and lives a very proper life as a king and ideal husband. (Both the epic hero and our subject, coincidentally, marry women named Sītā.)

Hagiographical materials are not historical documents but religious texts, commissioned and created by groups of people whose intentions and worldviews are shaped by the social and political circumstances in which they live. And these are the circumstances that concern us here.

Hagiographical narratives usually conform to certain patterns that trigger cultural recognition of sanctity, include anecdotes found elsewhere to bolster that image, feature a charismatic protagonist, and make use of mythology widely known in the culture. No matter how much they conform to preexisting patterns, they also point to significant theological positions. In the case of Advaita Ācārya the result of these patterns is the establishing of Advaita's position as the conservative forerunner and necessary cause of a radical new religious movement. That much is readily apparent. There may also be some less obvious and more subtly concealed purpose to the creation of biographies treating Advaita Ācārya, depending on when and where they were composed.

It is indeed curious that texts written about such important figures as Advaita and Sītā are not mentioned elsewhere in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature, a literary tradition in fact noted for its name-dropping. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, whose massive *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* sealed the literature treating the life and teachings of Caitanya, sanctioned many texts by his very inclusion of citations from them in his composition. On the other hand, he also damned other texts to oblivion and the curse of "inauthenticity" by ignoring them entirely. His failure to mention a given work, however, does not necessarily mean that the text had not yet been written when Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja was writing. For example, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja neglects almost entirely to mention the considerable literary output of Kavi Karṇapūra, from whose *Kṛṣṇacaitanya Caritra Mahākāvya* and *Caitanya Candrodaya Nāṭaka* he draws heavily (without attribution) in composing the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Apparently Karṇapūra's work was perceived as threatening the authority of the theologian Rūpa[95] and so could not be officially sanctioned.

Each of the subsects that formed after the death of Caitanya (as Kṛṣṇa Caitanya was usually called) under the leadership of various of his close associates

commissioned a biography of Caitanya except Advaita Ācārya's subsect, which only wrote biographies of its own leader.

Materials specifically dedicated to the other sectarian leaders do not appear for a generation or two after Caitanya's death. The first of these is Haricaraṇa Dāsa's *Advaita Maṅgala* (AM), a rather lengthy composition probably modeled on Jayānanda's *Caitanya Maṅgala,* to which I now turn.

2

Advaita Ācārya: A New Imminence

WITHIN ABOUT A CENTURY OF Advaita Ācārya's death, his followers commissioned a biography of their founder that would focus on those years of his life in which Caitanya was not present, in particular on Advaita's early years. In his *Advaita Maṅgala* (AM) Haricaraṇa Dāsa refers to himself as a disciple of Acyutānanda, Advaita's eldest son, and states that Acyutānanda requested him to write this biography of his father on the basis of accounts given him by the various devotees, including Acyutānanda himself, Śyāmadāsa, and other elder devotees.[1] The testimony of these elder devotees lends a stamp of authenticity to Haricaraṇa's narratives, for these men were eyewitnesses to the events they recount. And the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition generally regards Haricaraṇa's composition to be the authoritative biography of Advaita Ācārya.

Haricaraṇa mentions Kavi Karṇapūra and his *Caitanya-Caritāmṛta-Mahākāvya* (c. 1535), so he composed the AM sometime thereafter, though Haricaraṇa's own comments suggest he was writing within a generation of Caitanya. The oldest extant manuscript of the AM, of a corpus of ten, is, probably reliably, dated 1793, providing us with a two-century window in which to place the AM. Due to the nature of manuscript transmission and the vagaries of the Bengali climate, manuscripts in Bengal and the texts they convey remain frustratingly difficult to date reliably.

Rasikacandra Basu[2] believes that the AM predates the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, because Haricaraṇa mentions Karṇapūra's *Caitanya Candrodaya* (composed c. 1572) and would surely have mentioned the CC had it been available to him. Based on the conclusion of Paṇḍita Rāmgati Nyāyaratna that the CC was completed very shortly after the *Caitanya Candrodaya*, Basu postulates a date of composition for the AM of 1573. Dimock and Stewart, however, after decades of work with all extant manuscripts and published editions of the CC, posit a later

date of c. 1615 for the CC. Basu may be correct that the AM predates the CC, but most likely it was composed at least a few decades later than he believes.

Basu is likely correct in his claim that the AM is the earliest complete hagiography of Advaita Ācārya. The editor of the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* appended two footnotes to Basu's article. The first disputes Basu's claim that the AM is the oldest work in the Advaita Ācārya hagiographical corpus, citing two purportedly very early works, the BLS and the AP, as his evidence. The second note disputes Basu's claim that no one today celebrates Advaita's birthday, whereas in Advaita's time the occasion was celebrated in Sylhet. The editor points out that the Shantipur community observes the birthday annually with great festivity, as I, too, have observed, and will discuss in chapter 8.

Rabindranath Maiti published his careful critical edition of the work, based on all extant manuscripts of the text, in 1966. My remarks are based on Maiti's edition and my own examination of the manuscripts of AM.

Advaita Maṅgala introduces Advaita Ācārya as a significant community leader independent of his role *vis-à-vis* Caitanya. Haricaraṇa begins by establishing Advaita's theological identity and his firm position on the majestic *(aiśvarya)* end of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava continuum of devotion,[3] and in the course of his writing shows Advaita's movement along the continuum through each successive stage until finally, in the penultimate chapter, he has reached Caitanya's erotic *(mādhurya)* state. His early stance as a great exponent of monism is downplayed until book 5 (the final book), where Advaita Ācārya uses it as part of a ploy to gain Caitanya's attention. And throughout the book we find many theophanies, as Advaita reveals his majestic four-armed form (and even, once, a sixteen-armed form) to various devotees. In one case he changes from a four-armed form to a two-armed form, holding a flute. Each of these several theophanies reveals something new about Advaita Ācārya and reflects increasing realization on the part of those permitted that glimpse.

AM is divided into five sections, which I term books, based on the five stages of Advaita's life: infancy *(bālya)*, childhood *(paugaṇḍa)*, adolescence *(kaiśora)*, young adulthood *(jauvana)*, and old age *(vṛddha)*. Each book contains several chapters. The structure of AM is unique among the Advaita Ācārya corpus and quite unusual for South Asian hagiographies in general. The text is neatly and symmetrically constructed such that both the first and last chapters treat Kṛṣṇa *līlā*[4] with Advaita as Kṛṣṇa's *svarūpa*.[5] In book 1 the author introduces Vijaya Purī, who comes to predict Advaita's birth and mission and tells the story of Advaita's birth. In book 5 a parallel episode has Advaita Ācārya herald Caitanya's birth in a similar way. In each nativity story the elderly guru has a significant philosophical discussion, in private, with the newborn child about his imminent role in the world.

In the intermediate books Advaita first identifies and then absorbs his sectarian competition, establishes his own credentials, and collects disciples as he undertakes his mission in life.

Haricaraṇa does not always tell his story in sequential chronological order, sometimes describing events that occurred in Caitanya's lifetime in earlier sections of the book. Rather he tells his story thematically, with general, if not specific, reference to linear history. In this chapter I will discuss the narrative structure and content[6] of the *Advaita Maṅgala* and demonstrate what the text allows us to conclude about the ways its author so persuasively tries to move us toward his point of view.

Setting the Scene

In book 1 the author sets the scene for the life he is about to describe. After some discussion of Kṛṣṇa *līlā*, we find an interesting and ambiguous citation purportedly from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa:*

> And every *avatāra* has many forms;
> Therefore the Vraja play is not to be considered not the best.[7]

The quotation is not in the published edition and can be found only in one manuscript[8] of the text. Given the nature of manuscript paleography,[9] one cannot with certainty determine whether the author intends to say that the Vraja *līlā* is to be considered (*bhāvanīya*) or is *not* to be considered (*abhāvanīya*) the best. Because of the author's clear interest in connecting his subject with the Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, I have chosen the latter reading. In either case this citation prepares the reader to enter a fluid theological complex. In this scheme the Ultimate Reality is infinite and hence can manifest, entirely or partially, singly or multiply, in as many different times and places as are needed. Yet, of all the possible manifestations of divinity, the one that appeared in Vraja is supreme. And that Vraja manifestation is the adorable child Kṛṣṇa, darling of every woman in town. This Kṛṣṇa has two arms and plays a flute, which charms all those who hear it. Everyone who sees him immediately wants to embrace him. And the idea of a very human god, and the close and loving relationships he inspires, colors all the assertions our author makes concerning the theological identity of his protagonist.

In chapter 2 of book 1 Haricaraṇa introduces Vijaya Purī, already quite elderly, the author writes, at the time of Advaita's birth. He appears to the newborn Advaita and announces that, although he has traveled far and wide, nowhere has

he found devotion to and love of Kṛṣṇa. He further proclaims that he has come to Navagrāma to instruct Advaita in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP), for Advaita is the *avatāra* destined to spread that love of Kṛṣṇa and, further, announces that Kṛṣṇa's entire entourage would descend from Goloka, in Vaikuṇṭha,[10] to ensure his success.

Vijaya Purī continues to describe his travels, and mentions time spent in Vṛndāvana[11] serving Madana Gopāla,[12] an image he had found hidden in a cave there. That very Madana Gopāla sent Vijaya Purī to Navagrāma to seek out Advaita, telling him that the child he would find there called Kamalākānta is a partial embodiment of the Lord.[13] Vijaya then turns to Advaita's mother, whom he addresses as "sister," and tells her that Madana Gopāla had also told him that her son would be devotion personified (*bhakta-avatāra*) and that is why he has traveled to see him.

The conversation between the infant Advaita and Vijaya Purī continues into the next chapter, which opens with the line "I praise Advaita, the lord of Sītā's life, who brought in Mahāprabhu, the lord of Gokula." [14] Vijaya then begins to explain the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to Advaita and focuses on the story of Kṛṣṇa's birth.

At this point Advaita himself takes over the discussion, explaining some of the finer points of the story to an embarrassed Vijaya. The infant describes the *rāsa līlā*,[15] and Rādhā's activities with Kṛṣṇa[16] therein, and then moves on to discuss the type of service performed by Rādhā's girlfriends[17] for the divine lovers.

Now the elderly Śyāmadāsa enters the conversation to explain joint worship of the divine couple (*yugala-sevā*), telling Advaita that his duty will be to disseminate love of Rādhā along with that of Kṛṣṇa and to establish this new mode of worship of the couple as a unit. This discussion constitutes Haricaraṇa's first mention of this new mode of worship and the importance of Kṛṣṇa's female companions (the *sakhīs*) in the divine love play. As Advaita Ācārya ends his discourse, he reveals his true form to Vijaya, with four arms, and then shifts back to a two-armed figure holding a flute.

This first theophany encapsulates in its two images Haricaraṇa's entire book. The *mādhurya* Kṛṣṇa—the Kṛṣṇa with whom his devotees engage in that most intimate of human relationships, the erotic—is always depicted with two arms, because we humans can physically love only another creature like ourselves. The four-armed form, on the other hand, is so clearly nonhuman in its divinity as to inspire not intimacy but reverential awe, which requires us to keep our distance. Over the course of Advaita's lifetime, according to Haricaraṇa, his embodiment of the divine will move from that awesome majesty to the erotic sweetness of *mādhurya*.

Throughout Indian literary history, from the *Bhagavad Gītā* to the present, theophany signals the dawning of understanding in the person to whom that

vision is revealed. In this first of Advaita Ācārya's several revelations of his true nature (his divine form) the infant first displays the majestic form that is too tremendous for close human relationship. But then in showing himself to be Kṛṣṇa playing his flute the baby is creating a visual pun on his own future title of *advaita*. These various forms of the divine presence are "not-two" but are fully interchangeable, each contained within the other. This message is not lost on the elderly Vijaya Purī, who immediately proclaims this child to be Kṛṣṇa himself.

Vijaya Purī is only slightly less mysterious a personage than Mādhavendra Purī, mentioned earlier. Vijaya Purī appears only in literature dedicated to Advaita Ācārya, and we have no records of any line of succession, either sectarian or biological, descending from Vijaya Purī. Haricaraṇa tells us that the two Purīs were students of the same guru, both initiated by one Lakṣmīpati, and that they had traveled together on pilgrimage, so we are to understand that they were fairly well acquainted.

A bit further into his narrative Vijaya Purī provides some autobiographical details. He says that he also used to live in Navagrāma and that his father had been Mahānanda's (Advaita's mother Lābhā's father's) priest. Lābhā had always called him "brother," and he regarded her as a sister, so Advaita called him "uncle." These identifying details strengthen Vijaya Purī's credibility as a historical figure.

Once Haricaraṇa Dāsa has had a reliable witness proclaim Advaita Ācārya to be Kṛṣṇa, he then backtracks to present the story of Advaita Ācārya's birth. Vijaya Purī reminds us that Kṛṣṇa and all of his relatives and friends abide eternally in the heavenly realm known as Goloka,[18] where they perpetually carry out their various activities. From time to time, under extraordinary and rare circumstances, that entire heavenly realm descends, usually serially, with all its inhabitants, into the phenomenal sphere of existence. Purī proclaims that this is one such time, and, accordingly, Kṛṣṇa's parents appeared first, as Kubera and Lābhā.

Kubera and Lābhā had six sons[19] and a daughter. Four of the boys became renunciates and left home, while the others married and moved elsewhere to raise their families. Eventually Kubera and Lābhā, missing their children, moved to Shantipur to live out the rest of their days in prayer beside the River Gaṅgā.

One day, while Kubera was worshipping at the river, a beautiful woman suddenly appeared before him. He recognized her as Lakṣmī, consort of Mahāviṣṇu. She instructed him to take his wife and return home to Navagrāma, where her own husband would soon become their son. Kubera was not sure whether this meeting had actually occurred or simply been a dream, but he went home and told his wife the whole story. Shortly thereafter Lābhā did indeed conceive, and as she approached the time for delivery the couple returned to Navagrāma.

Their son was born in the winter, on the seventh day of the month of Mākara,[20] while, Haricaraṇa asserts, the whole world was performing appropriate rituals and shouting "Hare Kṛṣṇa."

The family astrologer proclaimed that Īśvara[21] himself had taken birth, and that this child would live a very long life. He named the boy Kamalākānta ("beloved of Kamalā [Lakṣmī]") because of his father's vision of Lakṣmī and her promise to him. At the naming ceremony the astrologer announced that all the scriptures state that Īśvara is nondual, so this child would be known as Advaita ("nondifferent," "nondual"). And, further, he says that this baby had previously been Vāsudeva, a patronymic signifying the son of King Vasudeva, that is to say, Kṛṣṇa.

Thus the astrologer has launched this child's career and placed him firmly at the majestic (the distant, awe-inspiring aspect of Ultimate Reality) position on the familiar continuum. At the same time he has connected him with Mahāviṣṇu, the most august form of Viṣṇu, with his recognized consort Lakṣmī. And, in asserting Advaita's identity as Vāsudeva, he promises us movement through the subsequent evolutes of Ultimate Reality as postulated in the quadruple array (*catur vyūha*) construction. Finally, in declaring this child Advaita, the astrologer echoes Vijaya Purī's pronouncement, preparing us to accept the notion that none of these various aspects and manifestations of divinity is either separate or different from any other.

As he began to grow, the child would eat only food that had been first offered to Kṛṣṇa and would cry unless he heard "Hare Kṛṣṇa." Already he had marked himself as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, long before Vaiṣṇavism had gained any sort of foothold in the region.

NEUTRALIZING THE COMPETITION

At the time of Advaita's birth goddess worship was a strong force with which any new religious movement to arise out of the same social stratum in Bengal would have to contend. Archaeologists have found large numbers of mother goddess images in Bengal, both simple terra cotta figures and carved stone images, dating from the eighth through the twelfth centuries, so clearly Śāktism was no newcomer. We have textual evidence for Durgā Pūjā, for example, having been celebrated as early as the eleventh century.[22]

Śāktism, deeply rooted in the region's history, constituted perhaps the largest devotional strand found in the region at the time, with more followers than either Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism. *Śāktism* is a rather generic term for a religious view that privileges the feminine. Though there are many goddesses, each with her

own mythology and iconography, Śāktas usually consider all these separate goddesses to be mere manifestations of different aspects of the One Goddess. That Great Goddess is often depicted with the god Śiva as her consort.

Despite all the clear confirmation of the presence and strength of Śāktism, the early Vaiṣṇava authors have little to say about what must have been a formidable obstacle to their movement. Most of the writers describe a pervading mood of "godlessness," chaos, and the absence of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, but they do not tell us what religious presence *did* dominate at the time. However, that "godlessness" creates the vacuum that Haricaraṇa will have Advaita, and then Caitanya, fill with their ecstatic mode of devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

Haricaraṇa Dāsa is the first Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava to overtly confront Śāktism in his writing. We find no such polemic in the Caitanya corpus. Haricaraṇa does so clearly, albeit slightly obliquely, in II.1[23] as he describes an emotionally charged encounter between the young Advaita and the local king, an ardent Śākta devotee. This bad-tempered brahman King Divyasiṁha used to tease the child Kamalākānta for his devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The king's son and the other young brahman boys with whom Kamalākānta used to study and play would harass Kamalākānta mercilessly for his attachment to Kṛṣṇa. After one such episode Kamalākānta turns on the prince and chastises him so severely that the boy falls to the ground in a faint. After Kamalākānta revives him, the boy promptly apologizes, but his father, whom Haricaraṇa refers to as "that clown of a king," continues to make fun of the young man and his devotion. The king's basic argument is that all things come from Śakti, and that one must even go through her to reach Kṛṣṇa. Kamalākānta, by now furious, does not accept this line of reasoning, and announces that he has no use for a goddess who does nothing but sit in her fancy temple all day eating sacrificial offerings. Still, he agrees to go to the temple with the king. And when the two set foot on her territory, something remarkable happens: the moment the goddess catches sight of Kamalākānta, she averts her gaze, and when the boy smiles at her she (or rather, her stone image) cracks apart. The king falls to the ground in shock at the sight of the image shattering, and everyone present wails in confused horror.

Kamalākānta runs home, frustrated, and tells his parents they have to leave town because he cannot live another moment in this place. He urges them to move to Shantipur where they can live out their days on the bank of the Gaṅgā and he can care for them. But, as the family prepares to leave, the king appears with all his courtiers and begs them to remain in Navagrāma.

Advaita's father Kubera apologizes to the king for his son's childish behavior. He attempts to placate the king by assuring him that it is in fact his royal devotion to the goddess that has sustained the kingdom for so many years.

Divyasiṁha protests that Kamalākānta is no mere boy but is actually Īśvara himself. Shaken by his own realization, the king regrets his repeated offenses, fearing ensuing and imminent disaster. He further proclaims that Kamalākānta is clearly an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, because no one else could have humbled the goddess as he had.

> You are Lord Nārāyaṇa . . . and in my ignorance I have offended you. Please have mercy on me and grant me refuge. . . . I realize that creation, maintenance and dissolution all originate with you, and in the midst of all that I am nothing.[24]

Everyone realizes that the goddess has in fact recognized that the boy before her is her husband Śiva and, as a proper wife, she can not accept anything remotely resembling his obeisance to her. Yet, perhaps precisely because she is his wife, she deserves to be treated with respect and not simply discarded.

This passage is more problematic than is initially apparent. Clearly we have here an anti-Śākta polemic. But, at the same time, we have the boy, who will become the pillar of his society, behaving disrespectfully in public to his wife. No proper brahman would do so; why then does Haricaraṇa include this anecdote, which seems a counterexample to his protagonist's sterling reputation? As if anticipating this very objection, the author does not end his tale with the shattering of the image.

For, as the king proclaims his change of allegiance to Kṛṣṇa, Kamalākānta, in a surprising move, explains to him why he should rather continue to worship the goddess. The boy even urges the king to construct a new image to replace the damaged one. He does, however, warn the ruler that the goddess cannot tolerate any slight to Kṛṣṇa and will desert him permanently if he subjects her to further insults. But Kamalākānta brings the focus back to Kṛṣṇa as he tells the king that, if he worships the goddess properly with food that has first been offered to Kṛṣṇa, she will be pleased and will bless him and his kingdom.

The king protests once again, comparing the boy Kamalākānta to a previous incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, the dwarf *avatāra:*

> When you were Vāmana you tricked Bali; and now here you are again, that same divine dwarf. You have rescued me from the ocean of existence; please reveal the name of the savior of the downfallen, O Ocean of Mercy. I have worshipped the goddess all my life, and now she has deserted me. And I have certainly abandoned her.[25]

Kamalākānta smiles and asks the king to be certain that he wants to forsake the goddess for Kṛṣṇa. Receiving the king's confirmation, the boy then instructs him to recite Kṛṣṇa's name and worship him according to scriptural injunctions. Further, he instructs him to honor all the brahmans and Vaiṣṇavas[26] in his kingdom at a special feast for Kṛṣṇa, and at the same time to sponsor a great festival for Śakti. He should continue to rule his kingdom until he reaches old age, at which point he should abdicate in favor of his son and come to Shantipur to practice devotion with Kamalākānta, who will give him further instruction at that time. With that, the young man and his parents depart from Navagrāma.

We later learn that this king Divyasiṁha became a great Vaiṣṇava and built an enormous temple whose floor he scrubbed with his own hands every day. He obeyed Kamalākānta's every order and eventually abdicated the kingdom, became a renunciate, and came to Shantipur as he had been instructed to do, given the name of Kṛṣṇa Dāsa. From Shantipur he traveled on pilgrimage to Vṛndāvana, where he lived out the remainder of his life.

Haricaraṇa provides no deconstruction of this remarkable turn of events. Clearly the goddess is capitulating to the boy. But Kamalākānta does not want her entirely done away with, as we see from his insistence that the king not only rebuild her temple but continue to worship her properly and with all due respect. Nevertheless, the king's primary object of worship now is Kṛṣṇa. In other words, Divyasiṁha is to forsake neither his ancestral practices nor the newer ones. He must serve both Kṛṣṇa and the goddess. A new movement's absorption of all local precedents is nothing unusual in South Asia, but this particular instance of accommodation seems to reiterate, or at least parallel, the joint worship of the divine couple Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, which Vijaya Purī has already discussed with the infant Advaita Ācārya.

Perhaps more significant is the king's request that Kamalākānta reveal to him the name of the savior, for in Kali Yuga, Haricaraṇa reminds us, the lord's name alone is enough to effect salvation. Conventional Gauḍīya theology has the notion of the salvific power of the Name appearing only with Caitanya. Yet here Haricaraṇa, with little fanfare, asserts that Advaita Ācārya, a half-century earlier, was actually the one to reveal the Name and its importance. This passage then is one of many in the *Advaita Maṅgala* in which the author subtly tells his readers that Advaita Ācārya was the first to do many things elsewhere attributed to Caitanya. Perhaps, Haricaraṇa seems to be saying, we owe far more than we thought to Advaita Ācārya.

Eventually Kamalākānta and his parents move to Shantipur, where they seem to have had some sort of ancestral connections. In fact, it is not clear whether the family originated in Sylhet and later migrated westward, retaining the family holdings in Sylhet, or vice versa. In either case we can deduce from their having two residences, and from the size of the crowds they are reported to have fed

throughout Advaita Ācārya's adult life, that the family was fairly wealthy. Their financial status will enable Advaita to support the fledgling movement by material as well as intellectual means.

Following his parents' death, Kamalākānta goes on pilgrimage himself, beginning with Kāśī, where he performs his parents' funeral rites. There Advaita and Mādhavendra Purī meet again, and Purī falls at the younger man's feet, saying

> Without Advaita's mercy we won't get Caitanya[27]
> Praise, O Brother, Praise to Lord Advaita! [28]

Upon completing his pilgrimage tour, Kamalākānta returns to Nadīyā. He approaches the brahman Śānta, in the village of Phulbāṛi, near Shantipur, for further education. Śānta recognizes the boy as Īśvara incarnate, accusing him of pretending to be an ordinary child just to trick him.

Thus childhood ends as Advaita Ācārya begins his studies in earnest. By this point he has absorbed his most likely competition—Śāktism—and moved to a new location on the bank of the most sacred river Gaṅgā from which to call the eternal Vraja and all her residents to earth.

ESTABLISHING CREDENTIALS

Book 3 opens with the description of the pilgrimage tour alluded to at the end of book 2, which began with Kamalākānta's trip to Gayā to perform his parents' funeral rites. The text says he traveled west from Gayā to Kāśī,[29] where he spent three nights with Mādhavendra Purī discussing Kṛṣṇa. The highlights of his pilgrimage can be found in the map on page 163, where Advaita's pilgrimages as described in both the *Advaita Maṅgala* and the *Advaita Prakāśa* are graphically compared with Caitanya's pilgrimage after the death of his father, according to the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta.*

The night Kamalākānta and his companion Kṛṣṇa Dāsa (although Kṛṣṇa Dāsa is a common name among Vaiṣṇavas, this companion most probably is the former king Divyasiṁha) enter Vṛndāvana, Madana Gopāla[30] appears to Advaita in a dream, with Rādhā at his left side, surrounded by all her female companions. In the dream Madana Gopāla sends Advaita home to Bengal, promising to appear there, along with all the people of Vraja, at Advaita's future summons.

In the morning Advaita awakes to find ten local women standing in front of him. Advaita tells them he can show them Kṛṣṇa the Lord of Vraja, and sends everyone to fetch spades and axes. Digging in the place Advaita Ācārya indicated,

the villagers discover the very image Advaita had seen in his dream. They build a temple and summon a brahman to perform the proper rituals to install the image. And when the image hears all this commotion, he calls out the name of Kṛṣṇa Miśra, Śrī's virtuous (and only) son.[31]

Advaita launches into an elaborate explanation of the preferred devotional attitude, that of love for a partner who belongs to another (*parakīya rasa*),[32] to explain these events and the significance of that particular form of Kṛṣṇa to the townspeople. He seems to want the people to understand why the focus of worship is to be on the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as a couple. He explains that Kṛṣṇa first tasted this risk-laden love through the intervention of an older woman named Paurṇamāsī, probably Rādhā's aunt, who drove him mad when she whispered "Rādhā" in his ear. Paurṇamāsī served as matchmaker and go-between throughout the relationship and went from Kṛṣṇa to Rādhā, whispering "Kṛṣṇa" in Rādhā's ear with the same result she had obtained from Kṛṣṇa. She taught Rādhā the mantra for erotic love and taught Kṛṣṇa the condensed version of that mantra, and from that day on the courtship (between the married Rādhā and the very young Kṛṣṇa) was on. That courtship of course is the model for devotion, with its goal of tasting the sweetness and intensity, and all the uncertainty, of the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Haricaraṇa has Advaita Ācārya tell the story of the intrigues of Vraja to the villagers to set the scene for the devotional model his protagonist will preach.

Meanwhile, in Advaita's story within a story, Lalitā and Viśākhā, two of Rādhā's girlfriends, equally enamored of Kṛṣṇa, are trying to figure out how they might win Kṛṣṇa's attention for themselves. Paurṇamāsī appears with a plan and sends all the young women to Vṛndāvana to worship the sun, telling them to let Rādhā's mother-in-law Jaṭilā know of their plans. Paurṇamāsī herself then proceeds to Jaṭilā's house. She reminds her of the good luck she has already accrued by praying to get the perfect daughter-in-law and suggests that worshipping the sun on his own day (Sunday) will result in even greater prosperity. Thus Jaṭilā should send her daughter-in-law down to the river with Lalitā, who knows how to worship the sun properly. And so the girls set off.

Kṛṣṇa is as distracted as Rādhā. He has gone out with the other boys to tend the cows, and once they reach the riverbank Kṛṣṇa takes Subala to go look for Rādhā.

By this time the girls have also reached the bank, and Rādhā is sitting under a shady tree pining for Kṛṣṇa. Her friend Viśākhā draws a picture of Kṛṣṇa to try to cheer her, but that only makes matters worse. Threatening to drown herself in the river if her lover does not appear, Rādhā faints.

Viśākhā sends a note to Kṛṣṇa via her friend Tūlasī. When Kṛṣṇa hears of his lover's condition, he becomes quite concerned and strings a garland of wildflowers for Tūlasī to take back to Rādhā as a token of his love.

After this long story, Advaita tells the assembled villagers that the Madana Gopāla who had appeared in his dream is that very Kṛṣṇa. He finishes his instructions to the local people and returns to Shantipur with Viśākhā's picture.

To recap: Madana Gopāla sends Vijaya Purī to seek out that portion of the Lord who is the *bhakta-avatāra*. That divine being had only just been born in Navagrāma. Many years later, while the young adult Advaita Ācārya stops in Vraja on the pilgrimage that began with his parents' funeral rites in Gayā, that same Madana Gopāla appears to him in a dream, promising to appear in Bengal at Advaita's (later) command. And, the very next day, Advaita, with help from several townspeople, unearths Madana Gopāla, bringing him to light in the phenomenal world.

Advaita returns to Shantipur from his pilgrimage trip and immediately launches into a very serious program of rigorous all-day austerities, which would continue for years. Large crowds of people would gather in the evenings to hear Advaita discourse on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP).[33] One day he announces that Mādhavendra Purī has appeared to him in a dream, telling Advaita that, if he summons him with an offering of rice balls, Mādhavendra will come to Shantipur that very day. And events transpire just as Advaita had dreamed.

When his guru arrives in Shantipur, Advaita requests him to reinitiate him. The two then retreat to a secluded place for three days, where their ardent discussions of Kṛṣṇa could continue uninterrupted. Recognizing how brightly the flame of devotion burns in his scholarly disciple, Mādhavendra Purī calls him:

> Kṛṣṇa . . . Rādhā and her companions; you are the very mood of devotion incarnate.[34]

Thus while Advaita is Kṛṣṇa, he also embodies all the devotional figures in the eternal Vraja.

At this point Mādhavendra instructs Advaita in *parakīya* love, so that Advaita can spread this mode of worship. Here too we find the first overt mention of the importance of the Name,[35] as Mādhavendra explains that the name of Kṛṣṇa has great strength in the current Kali Yuga and requests Advaita to teach the sixteen-syllable Kṛṣṇa mantra[36] to effect the salvation of the world. At the end of the discussion, Mādhavendra urges Advaita to marry so that his family can help him fulfill his duties to the world. Advaita agrees but says he wants to continue his austerities for a while longer, so that he will gain the spiritual strength necessary to summon Kṛṣṇa to earth.

The two Purī ascetics, Vijaya and Mādhavendra, are extremely important links in Haricaraṇa's narrative between Advaita Ācārya and the rest of the Vaiṣṇava succession. Their presence also demonstrates that Advaita is himself a link in a

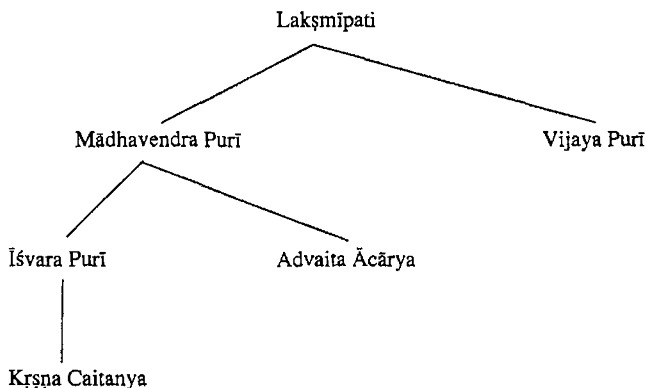


FIGURE 2.1 *Advaita Ācārya's Guru Lineage*

long line of Vaiṣṇava leaders, and that he receives authority directly from Mādhavendra, but also indirectly from Vijaya, and both sources derive from the authority of their guru Lakṣmīpati. Advaita and his godbrother Īśvara Purī then pass on the lineage to Caitanya just as Mādhavendra and Vijaya passed it to him. Lakṣmīpati is the link to the much older southern Vaiṣṇava tradition. Thus while the Gauḍīyas are unique in many ways, they descend, philosophically, from this older school. This assertion is a strategy of legitimation on the part of Haricaraṇa, though we assume from the text that he is pointing us to the spiritual ancestors of Caitanya and Advaita without spelling it out in his text. The diagram above clarifies these relationships:

According to Haricaraṇa, both Mādhavendra and Vijaya were initiated by one Lakṣmīpati, and so were brother disciples. But Vijaya is said to be Bengali, from Sylhet, and Mādhavendra seems to have been from the South. The facts of their disparate geographic origins are not necessarily incongruous, as ascetics are known to wander, and the entire devotional movement was born in the South, so we can easily imagine a northern seeker traveling south in search of further knowledge and inspiration. In principle, then, it is entirely plausible for a Bengali devotee to have traveled to Lakṣmīpati's hermitage in the south, where he would have met and befriended Mādhavendra and perhaps encouraged him to return to Bengal so that they might together spread the new devotional religion.

If that is the case, then why does Mādhavendra initiate devotees, while Vijaya does not? And, perhaps more important, why does no other author mention Vijaya Purī? If he is the man who brought Mādhavendra north, and Mādhavendra initiates Advaita, who in turn summons the incarnation for the age, Vijaya Purī should occupy a position of tremendous importance in the eyes of Gauḍīya

Vaiṣṇavas. And yet this is not the case. He remains obscure, known only to devotees in Advaita's own lineage.

Further, Vijaya enters the scene through Advaita's maternal lineage, thereby perhaps in some way sanctifying Lābhā as a fit vessel for the herald of the new incarnation and perhaps foreshadowing a later message about the importance of the maternal lineage.

The figure of Vijaya Purī provides a convenient example of how hagiography occupies a fluid position between history and myth. How does Vijaya Purī serve Haricaraṇa's hagiographical purposes? What does Haricaraṇa gain with this possible hagiographical fabrication? Vijaya Purī's geographical origin, in Bengal, suggests that the devotional community had long been a presence in the region. Further, his friendship with Mādhavendra Purī establishes the Bengali group as a peer community to Mādhavendra's southern Vaiṣṇavas, making the relationship one of social equals rather than the hierarchical one of guru-disciple. That is to say, their relationship subverts the (historically accurate) claim that Vaiṣṇavism was born in the south and then moved into the north and the east. And since Vijaya Purī is a part of Advaita Ācārya's extended family, he lends still further significance to Advaita's already important status as the herald of the incarnation for the age. The unvoiced suggestion that Vijaya Purī is responsible for bringing Mādhavendra Purī north to Bengal makes Advaita's lineage as responsible for the growth of the Vaiṣṇava community itself as for the advent of its leader.

Notice also that Advaita is the direct recipient of Mādhavendra's initiation, whereas Caitanya is the initiate of Mādhavendra's pupil Īśvara Purī; Mādhavendra's role in Caitanya's life is less direct, and Advaita is more senior in terms of the sectarian lineage. The text does not spell this out, but we as readers can simply assume it from our reading. Haricaraṇa Dāsa is demonstrating that Advaita's devotion was established long before Caitanya's. This is not history in any empirical sense, but the author's use of this figure and his connecting him with known historical figures is also not myth.

Now that Haricaraṇa has revealed Advaita Ācārya as the embodiment of devotion, he can disclose the origin of Advaita Ācārya's name. Indeed, the title *Master of Nondualism* is rather puzzling considering Advaita's role in this new and definitely dualistic religious movement. The name was an issue for the group. Gauḍīya literature may contain more etymological explanations of this man's title than of the name of any other important figure.

Haricaraṇa offers a story to explain the apparent anomaly. A peripatetic scholar from Tamil Nadu, who had earned the title Digvijayī[37] through his erudition and his debating skills, had heard of Kamalākānta and comes to Shantipur to debate the younger man. The contest has gone on for an entire week

when the goddess of learning, Sarasvātī, intervenes to ask the Digvijayī why he is debating with "the Lord Advaita."

According to Harīcaraṇa, the goddess was the first to apply the title of Advaita Ācārya to the young scholar, and, because her realm is the very relevant sphere of knowledge, the title endured. Why, when we have earlier seen the young Kamalākānta set goddess worshippers straight and urge them to worship only Kṛṣṇa, do we now see a goddess, Sarasvātī, the first to call him Advaita? The goddess had some time previously, we learn, granted the Digvijayī a boon by which he would be able to outwit any scholar he encountered. Thus he is very surprised to have been bested by this young man, and this unexpected defeat makes him realize that Kamalākānta is no mere mortal. And having the goddess serve the role of the bearer of the announcement of Advaita's theological identity further bolsters the position that the new Vaiṣṇavism is more powerful than the older religion.

The Digvijayī asks to see Advaita's true divine form, but Advaita tells him to simply recite the name of Kṛṣṇa. The Digvijayī refuses to be placated in this way, saying:

> I have finally figured this all out. You are the fundamental lord. Creation, maintenance and dissolution all occur at your command; you arose from the eternal cosmic egg. And the glorious Brahmā is your splendour. Yes, I have figured it all out. You are the one who appeared in the Yadu Dynasty, when you destroyed evil and rescued the whole world. You are the lord who takes birth in every age: I have figured it out. If you do not reveal your true self to me, I will die right here and now.[38]

Since the Digvijayī is a very wise man, his observation must be accurate. Advaita again tries to sidestep the issue, telling the Digvijayī to simply read the devotional scriptures. But at last he has pity on his guest, and reveals his four-armed form to him. Theophany is the reward for his understanding. The four-armed form signals once again the distant and majestic aspects of divinity. Some Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava writers will come to disparage scholarship as too dry to assist in the cultivation of a personal relationship with the divine. Nevertheless Advaita Ācārya *is* a great scholar, and so he fittingly displays that aspect of his nature to the Digvijayī.

And book 3 ends with this theophany. Advaita's academic defeat of the renowned scholar marks the end of his formal education and the beginning of the next phase of his life. Another aspect of Advaita Ācārya's divinity has been revealed and recognized.

Ministry

Book 4 begins with Haricaraṇa's reiteration that the sources of the information on which his book is based are Kṛṣṇa Dāsa's notebook, Śrīnātha Ācārya's[39] words, and Haricaraṇa's own observations: all the words of unimpeachable witnesses to the events they describe. Having reminded us of his sources (and he is still dealing with parts of Advaita Ācārya's life not attested elsewhere), Haricaraṇa turns to Advaita's early adulthood. Advaita Ācārya spent much of this period of his life in preaching and in performing rigorous austerities. As his reputation grew, he began to attract a number of extraordinary human beings to his circle of disciples and associates.

The first such person is Advaita's servant Haridāsa, who so pleases his employer with all his hard work and devotion that one day Advaita tells him to ask a boon. Haridāsa wastes no time and asks Advaita to tell him who he really is. Haridāsa says that he has already seen Advaita's four-armed form and that, further, everyone knows Advaita is Īśvara and devotion personified, but Haridāsa wants Advaita to explain all this to him in depth.

After his revelation, Advaita says:

> You know this whole story, but since you have forgotten it, I will remind you. You could never have understood who I am had you not experienced the vision of my four-armed form, and that is why I revealed myself to you in that way. Some say I am Nārāyaṇa, Lord of Vaikuṇṭha; some say I am Vāsudeva. Others say I am Mahāviṣṇu lying in the Ocean of Milk. Some say I am Sadāśiva, Īśvara. But Kṛṣṇa takes whatever form he wants, and it is no wonder that everything is possible for him.[40]

Advaita's explanation of his theological identity is remarkably similar to what we find in the CC, 1.5.112–113:

> Some say, Kṛṣṇa is the apparent Naranārāyaṇa; some say, Kṛṣṇa is the apparent Vāmana; some say, Kṛṣṇa is the *Kṣīrodaśāyī avatāra*. It is not impossible, and all speak the truth.[41]

But Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja is discussing the totality of Kṛṣṇa as Caitanya, not as Advaita! Haricaraṇa has taken a description that would probably be familiar to his audience and tweaked it to privilege Advaita. He has added Sadāśiva to the list of Kṛṣṇa's possible forms. Advaita is now everything we had always thought Caitanya to be, *plus* Sadāśiva.

These theological identifications are important for the grandeur implied, and the particular postulations selected are interesting. Mahāviṣṇu who lies in the Cosmic Ocean of Milk is responsible for all of Creation: that awe-inspiring, majestic deity sends living beings into existence at his will and command.

Vāsudeva is literally the son of King Vasudeva, but the name has a further significance in one Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theory of divine emanation, known as *catur vyūha*. *Vyūha* doctrine is theologically an explanation of an older notion that asserts that the Supreme Lord can divide Himself and yet maintain his transcendance.[42] Kṛṣṇa accomplishes this in one way in his great circle dance with the cowherd women, where each manifestation of himself is fully equal to all the others. His dispersal in *catur vyūha* is somewhat different. Here each manifestation arises from the preceding one and is fully contained in its predecessor. Vāsudeva is the first evolute in this system, a logical postulation then for the first member of the eternal Vraja drama to manifest in Bengal.

The fourth identity Advaita suggests is that of Sadāśiva. The medieval Śaiva precepts, according to art historian Doris Srinivasan, proclaim a triple Śiva reality consisting of Paraśiva (which Srinivasan calls the "theistic equivalent of the formless Brahman"), the fully manifested form of Maheśa ("great lord"), and the intermediate form of "the godhead on the way to full manifestation," Sadāśiva.[43]

While it is impossible to say with any certainty that Haricaraṇa was familiar with the Śaiva *āgamas*,[44] the image Srinivasan points out is strikingly appropriate to the present context. That scriptural construct shows an aspect of divinity that is no less than any other in every way except physical. And this aspect of divinity has been projected out of the abstract, formless Paraśiva, with the express purpose of bringing fully manifested divinity into the phenomenal world. Thus Advaita Ācārya constitutes that focal point at which the formless begins to take on form and emerge into the phenomenal universe: a significant construction for the man who would invoke the incarnation of the age.

The fifth term, Īśvara, is the most general and impersonal term in the list, conveying a sense of distance, awe, and reverence, with no hint of any human qualities and therefore, of course, no possibility of an intimate relationship of any sort.

Advaita continues, explaining the essential unity of each form Kṛṣṇa takes, and in the process explains how he himself plays several different roles in his own eternal drama. This latter enumeration appears to be a reference to Advaita's *mañjarī sādhanā*,[45] a meditation practice whereby the devotee visualizes himself as one of the prepubescent girls ("buds," or *mañjarīs*) who wait on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa during their loveplay. Advaita has not only an identity as one of these girls—Saṁpūrṇā Mañjarī—but also practices as Kṛṣṇa's friend Ujjvala ("radiant"),[46] who as *rasa* personified sparks the divine loveplay.

Announcing that he has now come to awaken the mood of devotion, Advaita says that he has come to earth to experience the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.[47] Finding a world bereft of devotion, he tirelessly performs rigorous austerities in the hope of remedying the situation. He vows first to bring in Kṛṣṇa's parents, Nanda and Yaśodā,[48] and then to make Balarāma appear in Rohinī's belly, and, finally, to bring Kṛṣṇa himself to Nadīyā. Advaita Ācārya announces his plan to put Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together in one body and to induce all their eternal associates in Vraja to appear in the area to introduce devotion.

Advaita Ācārya vows to keep performing these austerities for as long as it takes to accomplish these goals. "And once I have brought Kṛṣṇa here," Advaita says, "I will worship him, and will do whatever I can for him as his servant. The promise of Kali Yuga lies in the mood of devotion, so I will make him descend as his own devotee."

Already Advaita has taken the first step away from the majestic end of the continuum as he swears to worship Kṛṣṇa as his servant, the first stage of devotion.

Now we return to the frame story and learn about Haridāsa himself and how he came to be associated with Advaita Ācārya. Haricaraṇa says that all the gods in heaven heard Advaita roaring during his worship of the river goddess Gaṅgā Devī and wondered why he was performing all these austerities. So the gods traveled to earth disguised as beautiful nymphs. They danced provocatively before Advaita for seven nights, trying to disturb his meditation, but Advaita remained unmoved. He clearly understood who these nymphs were, for he smiled slightly and then glared angrily at them. They then transported him to the assembly of the gods, who asked why he had been performing such strict austerities. Advaita bowed his head and politely replied, "How else could I ever succeed in reaching you on my own?"

Meanwhile a second group of gods has also approached Brahmā to complain. Indra, king of the gods, speaks:

> Down on earth a mighty being is performing severe austerities on the Gaṅgā. He is reciting the Name and performing sacrifices, roaring all the while. His cry has pierced heaven and reached the gods, and we are very worried. No one can interrupt his austerities, and if this should keep up, we gods will become his slaves.[49] And so we have come to you.[50]

Brahmā praised the source of the gods' concern as the Supreme and sent the gods to take refuge in him and spread the Name of Kṛṣṇa in this Kali Yuga. He further promised that he himself would take human birth.

And so Brahmā subsequently took birth, in a lowly family. His mother died in childbirth, and the neighbors took him in. He comes to Shantipur, at the age of five, to Advaita Ācārya's place.

Advaita Ācārya immediately recognizes this child as Brahmā and names him Haridāsa ("servant of God"). He instructs Haridāsa to recite Kṛṣṇa's name and assures him that Kṛṣṇa will always shower him with mercy. This gracious reception startles Haridāsa, who questions it, given the social abyss between the elderly brahman and the base-born child.

Advaita smiles and says,

> Listen, Haridāsa. I shall explain it to you. Kṛṣṇa appeared in Vraja, where he tended cattle. He was a mischievous little boy, stealing milk from every house. Halfway through one such "feast" you rebuked him very sharply. And so to atone for that behaviour you were born into a base family. So now praise Kṛṣṇa whole-heartedly, spreading the Name in this Kali Age.[51]

And Advaita explains the appropriate mantra to him, syllable by syllable.

Meanwhile people are beginning to gossip maliciously as word circulates that Advaita, an observant brahman, has been feeding a Muslim. This apparent social anomaly seems to have generated a great deal of consternation in the brahman community, whose members could not understand why this powerful ascetic, whom some said was the mighty Īśvara, was so flagrantly violating convention.

Clearly, Haridāsa's presence troubled the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava leaders. We find the same problem also in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (3.3.201–213) and in chapter 1.11 of Vṛndāvana Dāsa's *Caitanya Bhāgavata.*[52] His presence in the community required explanation. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism has always insisted that salvation was available to anyone filled with devotion for Kṛṣṇa, and that anyone, regardless of birth, could be possessed of such love. Still, nearly all the followers of this new religion were brahmans.

Until, that is, the devotee who would come to be known as Haridāsa presented himself to Advaita Ācārya. Haridāsa's devotion not only to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa but also to the elders in the community was clearly exemplary. But Haridāsa had been born a Muslim, a member of a group increasingly seen as "the enemy" for political as well as religious reasons.

Haricaraṇa Dāsa reports that Advaita Ācārya, who himself sprang from the highest ranks of Bengali brahmans, was so impressed with the young man's heartfelt devotion that he completely ignored Haridāsa's background. At one point the other Vaiṣṇavas become very upset with Advaita's attentions to this Muslim boy and threaten to excommunicate Advaita. Haridāsa of course understands the ramifications of such a threat and tries to leave, but Advaita simply tells him not to pay any attention to those petty people. He lets it be known that he has scheduled a fire ceremony for the next morning, and tells Haridāsa that this rite will allow him to demonstrate his true position in the community.

But at sunrise the next morning, when Advaita and Haridāsa begin to prepare for the ritual, there is no fire to be found, for the brahmans have extinguished every fire in town. And with no fire available, no one in town can eat or drink for the whole day, and, as sunset approaches, the very old and the very young are becoming quite weak.

Finally the townspeople relent. Advaita Ācārya tells them that as long as the brahmans remain true to their religious teachings there will be fire, and instructs them all to take handsful of dried grass to Haridāsa, who will relight all the fires. Haridāsa then manifests his four-faced Brahmā form and lights all the priests' fires.

The brahmans tried to assert their control over Agni, god of fire, who lives in every sort of fire and source of warmth. In Vedic times Agni carried the sacrificial offerings heavenward, obeying the commands of the brahman priests to do so. Now the brahmans of Shantipur have extinguished every fire in town to punish the people. But they find themselves unable to rekindle the flames and are humiliated to learn that the Muslim-born object of their ire is the only person capable of relighting the fires. Haridāsa is able to do this, through the purity of his devotion—a purity those *born* brahman have lost. Advaita's disciple, at his guru's instruction, restores to them their ritual purity.

The relationship between Advaita and Haridāsa presents a different type of theophany from those Haricaraṇa has described thus far. Now he uses older mythological imagery, in which Brahmā emanates from Mahāviṣṇu's navel, floating on a lotus, at the beginning of every age. Brahmā does not, indeed cannot, exist without Viṣṇu. The attachment between the two is indissoluble, as is the bond between Advaita Ācārya and his devotee Haridāsa. And once again a theophany signals a burst of insight, this time on the part of the entire brahman community. Here their understanding is not of Advaita's divinity but of Haridāsa's as well as of their own pettiness.

Another individual to play a key role in establishing Advaita Ācārya's reputation was Śyāmadāsa, one of the first established scholars to acknowledge Advaita Ācārya as someone extraordinary. Śyāmadāsa, some years older than Advaita, has recognized him as Īśvara and swears to serve him in age after age. Advaita instructs him in the BhP. When Śyāmadāsa asks Advaita for initiation, Advaita gives him the Kṛṣṇa mantra and explains the four moods suitable for worshipping Kṛṣṇa: servant-master, friend, parent-child, and the erotic. And, as we have come to expect as understanding dawns, finally Advaita reveals his own true form to Śyāmadāsa.

The two stay in Shantipur working on Advaita's devotional BhP commentary and are eventually joined by such others as Govinda and Murāri, Puruṣottama Paṇḍita, and Kāmadeva. All these disciples practice devotion in the mood of friendship.

Notice that now Advaita is continuing to move along the continuum of devotion from his majestic starting point and is now at the second stage, the mood of friendship.

Śrīnātha, an outstanding scholar from the south, led another group of Advaita's devotees. He was the family priest and tutor of two quite extraordinary young men, Sanātana and Rūpa. Śrīnātha had given them the Kṛṣṇa mantra on the bank of the Gaṅgā and then taught them the devotional scriptures. The two brothers became ministers at the court of the local (Muslim) ruler.

Advaita Ācārya tells Śrīnātha that he will put these two to work spreading devotion in the west. To this end Advaita entrusts the worship of Madana Gopāla, the image he had found some time previously in Vraja, to Sanātana. The younger brother Rūpa is awarded an even greater assignment: to reveal another image, Śrī Govinda. Advaita announces that he will accomplish all his goals through them. And then Haricaraṇa allows Advaita Ācārya to expostulate a bit further on *parakīya prema* in his conversation with Śrīnātha.

Advaita mentions having met the great scholar Mukunda,[53] during a visit to the Jagannātha Temple in Puri, who asked him why Rādhā had left the great circle dance, the *rāsa līlā* of book 10 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Advaita replies that Rādhā had left the circle for a secret tryst with Kṛṣṇa, for only in private could their love affair remain hidden. She did not realize her lover was Īśvara but simply thought that the Lord of her Life would take her to sport in private, where their elders would never find them. Rādhā (married to another man) and Kṛṣṇa revealed the mood of *parakīya* love.

Kṛṣṇa performed the *rāsa līlā* with countless *gopīs*, but no one knew Kṛṣṇa was with Rādhā. The wise know that the whole *līlā* depends on Yogamāyā.[54] This Yogamāyā is Kṛṣṇa's magical power, personified as female. Yogamāyā always precedes Kṛṣṇa into earthly existence, and often functions to charm everyone whose path she crosses. She enchants people in ways that enhance Kṛṣṇa's stature in their eyes or further his purposes. In the case of this wondrous circle dance, she is responsible for making each *gopī* think she is the sole object of Kṛṣṇa's attention and for blocking each woman's perception of all the others present. Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa līlā*, his appearance multiplied so many times, is entirely Yogamāyā's doing.

The discussion of *parakīyā prema* found throughout the AM is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Descriptive, that is to say, of the intensity of the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and its cause. Unlike the later *sahajiyā* authors, however, Haricaraṇa is not prescribing that devotees imitate that behavior as a means to cultivate the desperate, single-minded devotion sectarian leaders advocate. Devotees nevertheless are to marvel at the wonder of a young woman's willingness to hurl herself off the precipice of social convention for a few fleeting moments

of passionate union with her lord, knowing that discovery can only result in her complete ostracism from family and society.

Culmination

The fifth and final book of *Advaita Maṅgala* introduces readers to Advaita Ācārya's wives and sons and eventually to Caitanya himself. Haricaraṇa specifically identifies Advaita's primary wife Sītā with Lakṣmī and writes that she was born to Nṛsiṁha Bhāḍudi and his (unnamed) wife in the village of Nārāyaṇapur, on the fourth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Bhādra.[55] Her "secret name"[56] is Kanaka Sundarī. Interestingly, her sister and eventual cowife Śrī's birth is not mentioned, though Śrī is named, and both girls are said to be Yogamāyā. Since we have just read passages highlighting Yogamāyā's importance in making Kṛṣṇa accessible to thousands of women simultaneously during his *rāsa līlā*, we can understand that Advaita's wives are more than remarkable women. The girls' mother died early, and the girls took over her household responsibilities. Sītā particularly enjoyed cooking and will continue to indulge that pleasure throughout her married life.

In time Nṛsiṁha, concerned about his daughters' future, begins to seek a suitable groom for them.[57] Meanwhile, Advaita's elderly friend Śyāmadāsa has been encouraging Advaita Ācārya, already advanced in years, to marry and start a family. Advaita thinks the suggestion ridiculous because no one would give his daughter to such an old man and continues to devote himself to the practice of austerities. But Advaita Ācārya asks Śyāmadāsa to start building him a large house and announces that, should the woman appear, he will marry her. Śyāmadāsa accordingly begins building the women's quarters and one room to house the *śālagrāma*.[58]

That year Nṛsiṁha brings his daughters to Shantipur for the annual goddess festival. When the girls approach the temple courtyard, Advaita is nearby, chanting and dancing, his topknot flying in the breeze. Sītā's gaze meets Advaita's, and instantly they fall in love.

Nṛsiṁha witnesses the interaction between the pair, and begins marriage negotiations with Śyāmadāsa (who serves as marriage broker because Advaita's parents are long dead). Nṛsiṁha has some hesitation about giving his daughters to the elderly Advaita and wants to discuss the marriage with his relatives first, but Śyāmadāsa persuades him to proceed, convinced that Sītā is the appropriate bride to help Advaita start a family.

The girls live up to expectations and prove worthy wives. Sītā rises before dawn every morning to bathe in the Gaṅgā before beginning to cook for her husband. One day not long after their wedding, Advaita decides his students

should meet her, and so invites them all for a huge feast. As Sītā serves the students, her hair comes unbound. Proper women never appear in public with loose hair, but the plates of food in her hands prevented her from tying it back. Just then two extra hands appear, retie the hair, and disappear again.[59] That four-armed theophany, albeit brief, constitutes her introduction to the public as her husband's proper wife. From that point on everyone recognizes her as Īśvarī, the suitable helpmate for Īśvara, and, Haricaraṇa states, clearly this couple is the same divine couple who had previously sported in Gokula. Thus once again we have the claim of identity for these two seemingly very different manifestations of the divine: the majestic and all-powerful and the erotically playful.

At this point Advaita Ācārya announces that he has pledged to bring Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, together in a single body, to Navadvīpa. This account, then, further substantiates the notion that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa incarnate serially in Kali Yuga. Kṛṣṇa first incarnated in Advaita, who then became a condition for Caitanya's advent. Rādhā's and Kṛṣṇa's first incarnations in Kali Yuga occurred in the persons of Sītā and Advaita Ācārya. Kṛṣṇa incarnated in Advaita and so was accompanied by Rādhā in the form of Sītā.

This image of Sītā as Rādhā at first seems inconsistent with Advaita's (and hence Sītā's) *aiśvarya* nature. When Advaita manifests his divine form, he nearly always reveals more than two arms, as did Sītā in this episode. If Advaita is Kṛṣṇa, he must be the Kṛṣṇa of Dvārakā, not the Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, and Sītā must be one of his proper wives and not a *gopī* with whom he would have a *parakīya* relationship. Haricaraṇa Dāsa appears to be purposely manipulating the theological image, moving the couple further along the continuum of devotion toward the erotic (*mādhurya*) mood and away from that of majesty and reverence (*aiśvarya*). And before long he will have Caitanya himself address this issue.

One day when Sītā Devī asks her husband why he has not yet blessed her with his teachings, Advaita replies, "You are Paurṇamāsī, the eldest of Rādhā's *sakhīs*. You are responsible for so many of Kṛṣṇa's activities. Everything you do is a blessing for the people. Worshipping Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is the best thing to do. Let me tell you something of its magnitude."

Then he gives Sītā the sixteen-syllable mantra and teaches her to worship the dual form of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Between Kṛṣṇa's cleverness and Rādhā's sweetness, Rādhā's mood is the greater because it civilizes Kṛṣṇa. Advaita explains that in the eternal Vraja he is both Kṛṣṇa's *icchā-śakti*, his power of desire, and the young girl Sampūrṇa Mañjarī. He describes his *mañjarī* assignments to serve and watch the divine couple in that secluded place, along with Rūpa Mañjarī, who serves their feet and dresses them, fanning them and offering betel. He goes on to reiterate that he will soon make that very Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa appear in Navadvīpa, where he will worship them with great affection.

Advaita Ācārya then teaches Śrī *mañjarī sādhanā*, giving her the name Kandarpa Sundarī, and teaches Sītā, assigning her the identity of Kanaka Sundarī. Advaita takes Śrī's hands and initiates her according to tradition while Sītā waits on the pair. Then he initiates Sītā's disciples Jaṅgalī and Nandinī, who had previously, in Vraja, been Vīrā and Vṛndā. Sītā makes them complete women,[60] and both worship in those (female) forms. Jaṅgalī keeps her Vṛndāvana identity as Vīrā, serving Kṛṣṇa. They both aroused enough *śakti* to make their male bodies look female.

Haricaraṇa elaborates on this gender-bending with a story about Jaṅgalī. Nearby was an uninhabited forest, full of tigers, bears, and very evil folk. No who entered that forest ever returned. Jaṅgalī went into that forest alone and built a little hut to live in, dressing up for Kṛṣṇa as a woman awaiting her lover. One day some hunters riding through the forest notice the hut. As they approach that house to investigate, they see a woman but no man. They hasten to inform the king. The king, intrigued by the report, decides to go hunting, and arrives at Jaṅgalī's hut at midday, extremely thirsty. When Jaṅgalī brings the men water to drink, the king asks who lives there, and Jaṅgalī says that she does.

One of the hunters tells the king that she is really a man, but has somehow become a woman. The king asks why a man should be living here in the forest dressed as a woman.

Jaṅgalī replies that she had always been a woman.

The king remains skeptical, and sends a few men to the village for another woman, so that Jaṅgalī can be examined without impropriety. When this woman undresses Jaṅgalī she finds her menstruating. This is not what the king had expected to hear, and, as if that were not enough, just at that moment Jaṅgalī turns back into a man before his very eyes. The king falls at her feet in devotion and offers to grant her a boon. Jaṅgalī asks simply to be allowed to remain there in the forest, and so he grants her the land on which she has been living.

The story of Jaṅgalī juxtaposed on Advaita Ācārya's instruction in *mañjarī sādhanā* highlights the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava notion that Kṛṣṇa is the only male and all his devotees are female in relation to him. The usual *mañjarī* practice is for male devotees to assume female identities for the purposes of meditation but not for the pursuit of their mundane activities. Jaṅgalī, however, has more or less permanently become female. And Śrī and Sītā, who are already real women, are also given *mañjarī* identities.

The founding triumvirate of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism included, along with Advaita and Caitanya, Nityānanda, a man of about the same age as Caitanya. We know from other sources that all three were tremendously important to the young movement, and Haricaraṇa tells us that Nityānanda was Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa's elder brother, and repeatedly mentions the unity of these three. Yet he tells us very little else about Nityānanda as an individual.

The next section is the only part of *Advaita Maṅgala* to discuss Nityānanda in any detail, and begins with his birth as Baladeva Saṅkarśaṇa[61] to Rohiṇī and Vasudeva, now appearing as Padmāvatī and Hāḍāī Paṇḍita. Haricaraṇa tells a brief story of an adventure Nityānanda had with his close friend Uddhāraṇa Datta when the two were on pilgrimage after the deaths of Nityānanda's parents. One night the young men stayed in a deserted forest, where they encountered an enormous demon. The demon tells them that this had been a place where brahmans performed *yajña*, but that those brahmans had all fled before the demon, leaving behind all their offerings. The demon asks why those two have come there to die, announcing his plan to eat them.

Nityānanda realizes no usual sort of weapon could defeat the demon, so he decides to overpower him with the name of Hari. And sure enough, the demon begins repeating Kṛṣṇa's name after them and starts to laugh as he is overcome with divine love. He becomes a devotee and asks for instruction. At that, Nityānanda grows enormous, so that his body covers the entire kingdom. The demon falls at his feet and begs forgiveness for his past behavior.

Nityānanda instructs him to go bathe in the river for purification. But the demon reminds Nityānanda that he is not entitled to touch that holy water. So Nityānanda sends him to meet Advaita Ācārya, who will take care of the situation, and then to take a pilgrimage tour. And all transpires accordingly. When the demon presents himself to Advaita, he tells him the whole story, and as he enters the river's waters, he dies, going to Vaikuṇṭha with his eternal body.

This episode is remarkably reminiscent of the story of the *Vāmana-avatāra*,[62] in which Viṣṇu appears as a dwarf to vanquish a demon king who has been plaguing the world. In that story the king promises the dwarf as much turf as he can cover with three steps, and then the dwarf begins to grow. Realization of whom he is dealing with strikes the demon quickly, and he immediately submits himself to be crushed under the foot of Viṣṇu. In Haricaraṇa's story the demon similarly realizes that he is inferior to Hari, prays for forgiveness, and dies entering the waters of the holy Gaṅgā. The image of a nonhuman dying at the hand of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, or immediately upon understanding the error of his past ways, and being transported directly to heaven or to a human birth, is quite common. Much more intriguing here is Haricaraṇa's positing Nityānanda as a form of Kṛṣṇa. He has already told us that Nityānanda was Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Baladeva. In this story Nityānanda plays an important role but it is nonetheless up to Advaita to purify the demon Nityānanda has just converted so that the demon may bathe in the sacred river and attain release. Nityānanda began the job, but his spiritual superior Advaita must finish it. The author cannot ignore Nityānanda entirely as he was the third member (with Caitanya and Advaita) of the leadership of the young community, and his closeness in age to Caitanya led

many people to refer to them as brothers. But Nityānanda was Advaita's chief rival, and we find many accounts of quarrels between the two men and their followers, some playful and others more serious.

Finally Haricaraṇa brings Caitanya into his narrative with the story of his birth. The author pointedly tells us that he is not going to reiterate what has already been written elsewhere, especially by Kavi Karṇapūra in his *Caitanya Caritāmṛta Mahākāvya*, finished, Dimock and Stewart say, in 1542.[63] He begins by showing the parallels between Navadvīpa and Vṛndāvana, both of which have water on three sides and are important pilgrimage sites.

In time Advaita Ācārya's austerities enable him to bring the entire eternal Vṛndāvana to earth. First, in the land of Sylhet,[64] Nanda and Yaśodā appear as Jagannātha and Śacī. They have six sons, who died one by one. They come west to live out their days by the Gaṅgā and in time they have another son, whom they name Viśvarūpa. But Viśvarūpa renounces the world and his own family, leaving Śacī again beside herself with grief. On the advice of neighbors Jagannātha and Śacī come to Shantipur, where they find Advaita performing austerities on the bank of the Gaṅgā.

Advaita reminds them that all their sufferings are according to Kṛṣṇa's will and promises that they will soon have a wonderful son. He asks them to stay with him in Shantipur for ten days.

Advaita Ācārya continues to perform his austerities in the river, roaring, for seven days. As the river begins to tremble, his earth-shattering roar reaches all the way to Vṛndāvana. The sound captivates Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and draws the couple upstream in the form of a *tūlasī* bud. Advaita picks up that bud with both hands and takes it into the house. He gives the main portion of the bud to Śacī to eat, and the smaller one to his own wife Sītā. Śacī and Jagannātha take their leave and return home. That very night Kṛṣṇa appears to Jagannātha in a dream, and he understands that Śacī has conceived an extraordinary child.

That child is born at twilight on the full moon in Phālguna,[65] during a full lunar eclipse. Though Advaita Ācārya is in Shantipur, he realizes the birth has occurred, and, using the eclipse as an excuse, he gives gifts to the brahmans and sings the name (of Kṛṣṇa) with great joy.

Śacī and Jagannātha are delighted with their new son, but when the child refuses to drink his mother's milk, they become worried. Jagannātha goes to Shantipur to consult with Advaita about this. Advaita and the distraught father return to Navadvīpa, where they find Śacī rocking the baby under a large neem tree. The older man looks at the infant and smiles, and asks him why he will not drink his mother's milk.

The baby announces that he will not drink her milk until she has been properly initiated with the Kṛṣṇa mantra.

Advaita duly confers the mantra on her, along with instructions to worship Kṛṣṇa, for this baby, he says, is actually Kṛṣṇa. Śacī places her hand on her son's head and recites Hari's name. And the boy eagerly drinks her milk.

Haricaraṇa turns from the advent of Caitanya to an even briefer treatment of Advaita Ācārya's own children. Acyutānanda, the eldest, was born at the same time as Caitanya, the result of Sītā's having eaten the smaller *tulasī* bud. The author compares Acyutānanda to Pradyumna, Kṛṣṇa's son by Rukmiṇī (i.e., his legal wife). And, in *catur vyūha* theory, Pradyumna is the third evolute of Kṛṣṇa's *svarūpa*, after Vāsudeva (Advaita Ācārya) and Saṅkarṣaṇa (Nityānanda). Haricaraṇa tells a story to demonstrate that Acyuta and Caitanya are the same.

One day Sītā set aside some milk for Caitanya. Acyuta and Caitanya were playing in the Gaṅgā. Noticing the hour is getting late, Advaita goes to the riverbank to get the boys and invites Caitanya to stay for dinner.

But Acyuta reaches home first, ahead of his father and Caitanya, ravenously hungry, and sees the milk Sītā had set aside. He drinks it all. When Sītā realizes what he has done, she becomes so angry she slaps him, leaving a huge mark on his face. When Caitanya arrives and sits down for the meal, Sītā notices that Caitanya bears the mark of a slap on his face and asks who had slapped him.

Caitanya replies to Sītā, "You did! How can a mother treat her child like this! Acyutānanda drank the milk and you hit him. Acyutānanda and I are not two separate people."[66]

Advaita Ācārya's second son Balarāma, Haricaraṇa writes, not only looks like Aniruddha but is his equal in every way. Aniruddha is the fourth element in *catur vyūha* and is Pradyumna's son. Thus among Vaiṣṇava dignitaries he ranks fourth. Advaita Ācārya instructs him in scripture and proper worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. Balarāma loved the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute, so Balarāma's *sādhanā* name is Venu ("the flute") Mañjarī.

Haricaraṇa does little more than name Sītā's three other sons, Śrī Gopāla, Jagadīśa, and Rūpa. None of the three plays a major role in sectarian history, which may account for Haricaraṇa's relative silence about them.

Śrī produces only one son, named Kṛṣṇa Miśra, but her son becomes Advaita's heir. Toward the end of his life Advaita Ācārya brings out his *Bhāgavata* commentary and summons both Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa Miśra. He hands over the commentary to Balarāma and entrusts the worship of Madana Gopāla to Kṛṣṇa Miśra.

Haricaraṇa finally turns to Advaita's activities with Kṛṣṇa Caitanya in V.7.

After Keśava Bhāratī initiates him into *sannyāsa*, Caitanya returns to Shantipur. Advaita Ācārya proclaims, "You are Nārāyaṇa incarnate. I sang your praises before, and now that you are a renunciate, I serve your feet."[67] Caitanya had always considered Advaita his guru,[68] though Caitanya said nothing of the sort in public. But Advaita is unhappy with this relationship and chastises the younger man.

Caitanya says,

> You are the elder one; do not toy with me like this, or people will reproach me. You are my mother's guru. And you are Mādhavendra's disciple, so I am also his disciple. It's you who are the elder, the one with all knowledge of the Vedas. And here you are falling at the feet of a child! Do not treat me as your equal![69]

Advaita has been frustrated that Caitanya insists on treating him with the proper respect due an elder, when he wants to be treated with the same intimacy Caitanya's students receive. Up to this point Advaita's relationship with Caitanya has been hierarchical, but now he craves the richer (i.e., more intimate) experience of *sakhya* (friendship) with Caitanya. Advaita, who represents the *aiśvarya* (majesty) aspect of divinity, is trying to move himself along the spectrum of devotion to *mādhurya,* where Caitanya is located. And to do so he concocts a plot to incite Caitanya's wrath, which will bring Advaita the attention from Caitanya he so desperately wants. According to his plan, Advaita begins preaching from a monistic perspective, teaching *nirguṇa*[70] Brahma. This apparent change of philosophical direction dismays his disciples, and eventually word reaches Caitanya. Śaṅkara and a few other students remind Caitanya that Advaita Ācārya had previously been an excellent exponent of such scriptures and that, unless Caitanya stops him, Advaita Ācārya will spread his nondualism to the entire world. Accordingly, Caitanya sends Gaurīdāsa to speak with the scholar.

Advaita displays his four-armed form to Gaurīdāsa, who returns immediately to Caitanya to report these events, only to be sent back to Shantipur. This time Advaita displays a sixteen-armed form and insists that Gaurīdāsa bring Caitanya to him. Caitanya duly arrives and berates Advaita.

Advaita's assuming of the *aiśvarya* forms in this episode again displays one end of the hierarchy of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotional experience, contrasting Advaita's awesome majesty with the intimacy of Caitanya's *mādhurya* (sweetness). And the sixteen-armed form only serves to emphasize Advaita's point and his desire to present the most *aiśvarya* picture he can.

While this episode is not discussed in the Caitanya materials, the CC does include mention of Advaita's previous teaching of *jñāna* and Caitanya's disapproval thereof.

The two reconcile, though some of Advaita Ācārya's disciples, confused by their guru's philosophical vacillation, remain *advaitins*. And subsequently Caitanya orders Advaita to abandon those students who continue to cling to *advaitavāda*. But one disciple, Śaṅkara, remains.

Advaita asks Śaṅkara to throw the manuscript of his *advaitavādin* commentary on BhP into the river. Śaṅkara hesitates, and wants to debate Advaita Ācārya, with the winner deciding the fate of the manuscript. Finally Śaṅkara takes the manuscript and flees. But everyone knows that Śaṅkara[71] has forsaken Advaita Ācārya, and thereafter no one would associate with him.

Caitanya said,

> You can only reach me through Advaita's grace. No one who fails to praise Advaita is a devotee of mine, and I have no mercy for him. The world knows that Advaita Ācārya brought me in! Thus whoever recognizes no difference between Advaita and me will obtain Kṛṣṇa's mercy.[72]

After their reconciliation Caitanya comes to Shantipur with Advaita and all their disciples for a tremendous festival at Advaita Ācārya's house. Sītā Devī cooks[73] with unusual joy.

Sītā always knows each guest's food preferences, and serves him accordingly. Caitanya said, "I especially like spinach," and so she heaps his plate with the spinach dish. Nityānanda said, "I love sweets," and she keeps bringing him more rice pudding. They both eat with great relish, much to Advaita's delight. The whole community always praised the food served at Advaita Ācārya's house.

One day Caitanya decides to invite the whole village for a feast to demonstrate Sītā's majesty, and so he sends Govinda through the town with his drum inviting everyone.

The food for the feast fills two rooms, with different dishes in every corner. Caitanya urges the gathered crowd to enjoy all the food that Sītā has prepared for Kṛṣṇa, for one should never pass up Kṛṣṇa's *prasāda*, his grace.[74]

Caitanya then asks Advaita Ācārya to sit with him, and tells Sītā to serve them all. He tells her that she will demonstrate the inexhaustability of Advaita's storehouse and, through that, her own perfection.

Sītā serves all the devotees and the twice born, all seated in their proper rows, and Īśāna and Śyāmadāsa serve all the other guests. Caitanya tells everyone to ask for their favorite dishes, and whenever someone's plate is empty the food replenishes itself. Caitanya asks for more spinach, Nityānanda the rice pudding, and Advaita Ācārya wants the banana flower dish.

Then suddenly there are as many Sītās as there are guests, one Sītā serving each what he asks for. Advaita and Nityānanda look at Caitanya. "You have made Sītā do just what you did in the *rāsa līlā*!"[75]

Caitanya responds, "Don't be so surprised! You should realize that she's like Śrī Rādhikā. No one realizes Rādhā's divinity,[76] but now you have seen it for

yourselves." Caitanya has all along been describing Sītā as a special form of Rādhā, whom we do not associate at all with the *aiśvarya* end of the devotional spectrum. Here at last we find clarification, and the parallel being drawn between Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Sītā-Advaita makes sense. Caitanya has been telling us that Kṛṣṇa is all things to all people or, rather, different things to different people, so that he appears in whatever form an individual devotee is likely to find comforting. Thus it is not at all incongruous for Haricaraṇa to describe Sītā as Rādhā, so long as we understand that he is drawing upon the rarely cited majestic aspects of Rādhā.

In the final chapter the founding triumvirate reenacts the much loved story of the milkmaids and Kṛṣṇa's attempt to tax them for their wares, the *dāna līlā*. Advaita Ācārya takes the part of Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya plays Rādhā. Nityānanda is the old woman, and Śrīvāsa and a few others play the girls, while others take the roles of the boys.

Thus begins their enactment of the familiar episode, with Kṛṣṇa and his friends insisting the milkmaids pay double tax for their heavy hips and breasts. The girls refuse to pay, and after a great deal of banter on both sides the boys steal their dairy products. At that point the game dissolves and all the devotees begin to play in the water. The three lords, as one, overflow with divine love, to the point of losing consciousness, and fall in the water. The devotees fish them out and seat them on the bank and look after them while they sing about the *dāna līlā* of Gokula. For quite some time the three can only babble incoherently amongst themselves. This causes their disciples much consternation, and so the three revert to normal awareness. Advaita Ācārya gets up first, crying out "*huṁ!*" Caitanya dances with Nityānanda, shouting, "Hari, Hari!" his hand on Advaita's head. They dance til they fall exhausted and then go home to rest.

And here the text ends, with nothing about Advaita's or Caitanya's deaths.

Advaita Maṅgala appears on no list of great literature. Rasikacandra Basu points out that the author frequently violates the rules of versification and that his descriptions are simple rather than poetic. Its author demonstrates nothing unusual in his control of complex metrical patterns, figures of speech, or choice of vocabulary. The AM cannot compare with such religious works as the *Gīta Govinda* or the *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtana*, both composed in eastern India. Nevertheless, it is an important and exceptionally well-constructed symmetrical text in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiographical tradition. Haricaraṇa Dāsa's comments on his subject do not challenge the image of Advaita Ācārya established in the Caitanya works but elaborate on it in many ways. Haricaraṇa provides us with narratives on those parts of Advaita's life that did not intersect with Caitanya's, especially the years before Caitanya was born. He tells us about Advaita's family

background. And, quite often, he does so in ways that parallel accounts in the Caitanya corpus, thereby subtly suggesting to his reader the greatness of his subject. But only after he has carefully established his protagonist's identity does he begin to tell us of Advaita's role *vis-à-vis* Caitanya, and that comes so late in the book as nearly to constitute an afterthought.

Haricaraṇa includes a number of events and characters not found elsewhere in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature. These include Vijaya Purī, Śrīnātha Ācārya (the family priest of Rūpa and Sanatāna), and Divyasiṁha, who makes his first literary appearance here. And the story of the three lords enacting the *dāna līlā*, at the end of the AM, appears nowhere else in Gauḍīya literature.

Haricaraṇa's Advaita reveals his four-armed majestic form to the Digvijayī, to Vijaya Purī (who is also granted a vision of the two-armed figure, with a flute), to Haridāsa, Śyāmadāsa, and twice to Gaurīdāsa (who also sees a sixteen-armed lord). Advaita is given numerous epithets: Vāsudeva, Mūla-Nārāyaṇa, Īśvara, Pūrṇabrahma, and Mahāviṣṇu.

From a theological perspective perhaps the most interesting aspect of the AM is its portrayal of Advaita and Caitanya as equal incarnations of Kṛṣṇa. Clearly, in telling his readers that Advaita's parents were King Vasudeva and his queen Devakī, he is telling us that Advaita himself is their son, Kṛṣṇa. Kubera's vision of Lakṣmī announcing the imminent birth of her husband Viṣṇu to Kubera's wife is equally revealing. And while Haricaraṇa repeatedly comments on the superiority of the Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, with all his erotic exploits, he also tells us that no manifestation of Kṛṣṇa is greater than any other, and this apparent contradiction is no paradox, for all things are possible for Kṛṣṇa.

Haricaraṇa handles what must have been the serious competition from the Nityānanda camp largely by ignoring it. Although Nityānanda is as significant to the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as is Advaita Ācārya, Haricaraṇa only barely brings Nityānanda into the narrative, and there only to tell us that the three founding fathers are one, and the One is all three, differentiated purely for the Lord's own amusement. Clearly Nityānanda is not important to this text, but rather this nondifference—this *advaita*—of the three founders and their concomitant interdependence are the point of Haricaraṇa's entire literary effort. Haricaraṇa tells us that Advaita is superior to Nityānanda, though, with the episode of the demon and Nityānanda's inability to bestow ritual purity on his new convert.

Of further interest are Advaita's role and strategies in bringing in the *avatāra*. Vaiṣṇava literature unanimously recognizes him in this capacity as harbinger of Caitanya, so Haricaraṇa has to discuss it, no matter how little attention he would prefer to devote to the younger man.

First, Advaita stormed heaven and performed vigorous austerities for many years. This established his perseverance and piety and demonstrated that he was sufficiently well-versed in scripture to know what actions to take to bring about his desired result. Second, when his pleas finally caught Kṛṣṇa's attention, and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa came floating to Shantipur as a *tulasī* bud, Advaita fed the main part of that bud to Śacī (and a smaller piece to his own wife), thereby in a sense inseminating her. And third, once the infant was born, Advaita Ācārya had to intervene, at a time when nonfamily members normally are not allowed access to a newborn child and its mother, to ensure the infant's survival when the baby would not nurse. Thus, as Haricaraṇa points out, Advaita Ācārya's grace is prerequisite to any grace of Caitanya's.

Late in the AM Haricaraṇa takes a familiar description of Kṛṣṇa as Caitanya with which Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja explained Caitanya's identity as every possible aspect of divinity. Haricaraṇa applies that description not to Caitanya but to Advaita, in an attempt to place Advaita at the fore of sectarian attention and adulation. And by his silence on the issue of Advaita's death he mimics the technique both Nityānanda Dāsa and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja had used with regard to Caitanya: he simply ignores it, for it is of no theological importance. The Divine cannot die but merely shifts locus.

How did Haricaraṇa's efforts stand up over time? Did subsequent members of Advaita Ācārya's branch have anything further to say about their founder? In the next chapter we will examine the continuing history of Advaita Ācārya.

3

Variant Messages: Nonhagiographical Texts Treating Advaita Ācārya

THE GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVAS PRODUCED a great deal of hagiographical material within the first century and a half of their founder's life. Their theologians codified the group's practices and beliefs and their more artistically inclined writers composed dramas and songs celebrating the first generation. Most of these works have been deemed sufficiently important to have found their way into print at least once in the last hundred years, and several have even attracted scholarly attention outside India.

Less known are a number of briefer works of various types, some of which were composed in the movement's early years, others as late as the seventeenth century. Few of these have been published, but several remain extant in multiple manuscripts scattered around Bengal. Given the ephemeral nature of organic material under Bengali tropical conditions, it is likely that still more of these minor[1] works decomposed before twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars thought to investigate early and premodern Bengali religious history. Still, several do remain extant, and in this chapter I will briefly discuss each one that has some bearing on Advaita's school. None of the texts I will discuss in this chapter has played a significant role in the development of Advaita Ācārya's image or of his school. They were composed on the margins of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, and the Gauḍīya Maṭha, the "official" institution, disavows these particular groups. The reverse, however, may not be true, for, as we will see, the authors of these texts appear to be trying to authenticate their groups within Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava membership. They make certain dramatic claims that may only be possible on the margins of a community.

This particular group of texts is subordinate to the larger hagiographies discussed in the other chapters in this book. All are extant in libraries in West Bengal, most in Kolkata, and from this we can reasonably deduce that they had not been widely dispersed throughout the entire geographical extent of the Gauḍīya

Vaiṣṇava community. Since they are contained in a small area, their influence must be limited to the Vaiṣṇavas of that region; otherwise we would likely find manuscripts of these texts in Comilla or Sylhet, for example.[2] Their relatively large (compared to the rest of the Advaita corpus) numbers may well reflect instances of personal, rather than community, transmission. That is to say, perhaps these pieces were passed from guru to disciple personally and not intended for widespread distribution but rather simply for the instruction of individual disciples.

In considering these texts we will see how marginal groups loosely connected with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school sought to use Advaita's name and reputation to strengthen those ties and bring them legitimacy and recognition. The texts are all interesting because they tell us about the concerns of another group of participants in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, albeit participants in marginal groups. At least a few of them exist in more copies than do some of the more widely known and influential texts. This curious fact suggests greater local popularity, despite their rejection by the mainstream. More important, the more numerous texts among them demonstrate efforts on the part of significantly sized subgroups to claim a spot within the greater Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition's umbrella of legitimacy.

I have divided these compositions into four groups according to their subject matter. *Meditation* texts describe meditation techniques their authors ascribe to Advaita. *Ritual* texts consider the extremely controversial sexual religious practices one group claims Advaita practiced. *Biography* texts describe aspects of Advaita's life (and differ from the major hagiographical works considered in other chapters of this book). The last category, *Padāvalī*, describes short, nonconnected verses in praise of Advaita.

Sometime in the 1970s a few dedicated Kolkata Vaiṣṇavas discovered these previously little-known manuscripts in the collections of various local libraries and took it upon themselves to start publishing a number of them. Their legitimate concern that these works were in danger of disappearing entirely before they had attained any sectarian or scholarly attention has preserved, at least in some condition, the texts. Unfortunately the published texts were not carefully edited or proofread, and many orthographic errors not found in the manuscripts were introduced, making the materials often difficult to decipher. The amateur nature of the publication in itself, with inconsistent print quality, provides further challenges to the reader. These infelicities pale, however, in the face of the otherwise inevitable complete loss of these texts. Since microfilming or digitization is not always a preservation option, these diligent people have done not only their own community but also the academic world a great service in their attempt to retain some of the more obscure products of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literary efforts.

One of these literary saviors is Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī of North 24 Parganas, on the outskirts of Kolkata. He published a remarkable number of these minor

works, in several dozen booklets. Among these, most germane to our study is a fifty-four-page volume first published in Kolkata in 1980 (with a second edition six years later) as No. 10 in the series Śrīśrī Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Śāstra, entitled *Śrīśrī Sītādvaita-Tattva-Nirūpaṇa.* The booklet sold for 4.50 rupees,[3] a price quite affordable for those interested in its contents. Indeed the low price and the appearance of a second edition suggest that the book enjoyed fairly wide circulation. The book contains Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī's introductory article "*Śrīśrī Sītādvaita-Tattva-Nirūpaṇa,*" with citations from various well-known Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts about Advaita Ācārya and an article on the life of Advaita, for which the author draws from various hagiographical works on Advaita Ācārya as well as from the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta.* The *Advaitoddeśa Dīpikā* follows the author's introduction, and I will examine it in detail in the following section.

Meditation

Advaitoddeśa Dīpikā[4]

The bulk of the *Sītādvaita-Tattva-Nirūpaṇa* consists of transcriptions of two manuscripts which Kiśorī Dāsa had located in the possession of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat (BSP, Bengali Literary Society). The first of these, MS No. 2894 in the BSP manuscript collection, is Devakīnandana Dāsa's *Śrī Advaitoddeśa Dīpikā (AUD),* "The Light of Lord Advaita's Instructions." While the BSP piece seems to be the only extant manuscript of this text in Bengal, MS No. 430 in the collection of the Vṛndāvana Research Institute (VRI), entitled[5] *Sītā-Advaita-Siddha-Bhāva-Nirṇaya* ("Conclusions Regarding Sītā's and Advaita's Perfected Meditation") and attributed to Devakīnandana Dāsa, appears to be the same text. Devakīnandana Dāsa tells us he is a disciple of Advaita Ācārya's second son and spiritual heir, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, and of Balarāma, Advaita's fourth son. And indeed while both AUD and *Advaita Svarūpāmṛta* ("The Nectar of Advaita's True Form," henceforth ASA), the other text in the booklet, discuss Advaita and Sītā, clearly these works derive from the theologies of their sons Kṛṣṇa Miśra and Balarāma, who are frequently quoted in both texts. Only these two sons of Advaita's six married and had families; only they could carry the family name and lineage into the next generation. Shortly before his death Advaita gave Kṛṣṇa Miśra responsibility for carrying on his temple duties and entrusted his worldly wealth to Balarāma.

The BSP manuscript includes brief Sanskrit citations from various sources, which Devakīnandana then translates into Bengali. The VRI manuscript contains none of the Sanskrit passages, although the *gosvāmī*'s[6] comments in Bengali remain.

The text itself is undated, quite short, and simply an outline with brief explanations of the meditation identities used by Advaita and Sītā. The author pays his respects to Caitanya, Nityānanda, Advaita, and Advaita's son Balarāma, through whose grace, according to Devakīnanda Dāsa, this text was written.[7]

The author of the AUD expands on some of the material we saw in the AM, although given the problems of dating all these texts it is impossible to determine whether this is an expansion deliberately based on the AM or an independent development.

The main theme in AUD is the importance of the environs and activities in Vraja for contemporary Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal. The historical Vraja was a pastoral region understood to be Kṛṣṇa's childhood home, located in the modern state of Uttar Pradesh centred around the town of Vṛndāvana, about three hours south of Delhi today by rail or road. For devout Vaiṣṇavas, Vraja has both a mundane, earthly manifestation and a timeless one in which Kṛṣṇa and all his friends and relatives continuously carry out all their storied activities. At the end of DvāparaYuga, the third age of cyclical time in Indian cosmology, the eternal Vraja touched earth and the two coincided for the duration of the childhood and adolescence of Kṛṣṇa. Devakīnandana explains that that immortal, timeless Vraja became manifest again in Kali Yuga in the late fifteenth century in Nadīyā, with all the actors in Kṛṣṇa's eternal drama taking on new roles for their appearances with Kṛṣṇa in Bengal.

The author also discusses the practice of *mañjarī sādhanā*. Briefly, *mañjarī sādhanā* is a meditation practice in which the aspirant, instructed by the guru, adopts the identity of one of the (usually female) participants in Kṛṣṇa's original Vraja and visualizes himself as that person performing her usual activities. The aspirant is nearly always male and the assigned role nearly always female. As the name of the practice suggests, most often the identities prescribed were those of the *mañjarīs*, the "flower buds" of Kṛṣṇa's entourage, the prepubescent girls who waited on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa during their lovemaking.[8] The goal of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is the cultivation of an everlasting and personal relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and through this practice of imagining oneself an integral part of his activities the devotee would come to see himself as intimately involved in Kṛṣṇa's life and thereby attain his goal. Vaiṣṇavas insist that the most desirable relationship to cultivate is the erotic (*mādhurya*) one, because that is the closest of all human relationships. The *mañjarīs* are a good choice then, as they foster the erotic relationship between the divine lovers and obviously witness this interaction, though they are themselves too young to participate in erotic activity.

Occasionally, however, a guru might assign a different sort of identity, one that epitomizes another of the devotional moods. Devakīnandana reports that Advaita practiced as several different Vraja characters, as did his primary wife

Sītā. Only one of the roles assigned to each was, strictly speaking, that of a *mañjarī*, though all represented people very close to Kṛṣṇa.[9] The choices of roles are of course not random, but very significant, for they reveal something of what Devakīnandana, or his gurus Kṛṣṇa Miśra and Balarāma Gosvāmī, want us to know about Advaita and Sītā.

Devakīnandana tells us that Advaita adopted the meditation roles of Kṛṣṇa's companion Ujjvala, Vasudeva's son (Pūrṇatara) Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā's companion Viśākhā, Sampūrṇā Mañjarī, and Sadāśiva.[10] Advaita Ācārya, we are told, worshipped in the moods of both servitude and friendship, so that his practices fall near the beginning of the devotional continuum discussed in the introduction. The mood of a servant of Kṛṣṇa is clearly a relationship between nonequals, though often a very intimate one. Friendship, in contrast, moves the aspirant into a peer relationship as a companion to Kṛṣṇa in his various adventures. Either association can of course be quite close, but the nature of the intimacy shifts from nonreciprocal servitude to the mutuality of friendship as one moves along the devotional continuum from one to the next, with each successive mood encompassing its predecessors. We will examine each of Advaita's *mañjarī* assignments in turn.

Ujjvala was one of Kṛṣṇa's closest childhood friends. He participates in Kṛṣṇa's mischievous activities, stealing butter from the housewives of Vraja, and Kṛṣṇa often rescues him when demons threaten that idyllic pastoral haven. The relationship between Ujjvala and Kṛṣṇa is one of playful equals, and so falls squarely in the middle of the devotional continuum. He is an obvious choice for "friendship," although somewhat unusual, as in this particular practice the meditation roles were normally those of women.[11]

Viśākhā at first glance seems a more appropriate assignment. She is a close friend of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, encouraging their romance and consoling one when the other is absent. Viśākhā's role with both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is parallel to Ujjvala's with Kṛṣṇa alone. Positing Advaita as Viśākhā thus illustrates Advaita's important and very close position in relation to Caitanya, the dual embodiment of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Further, both Ujjvala and Viśākhā are closer to their respective friends than the *mañjarīs* were and relate to them as equals. Unlike the *mañjarīs*, however, neither Ujjvala or Viśākhā is ever present during the divine couple's love-play.

Advaita's next *sādhanā* role is more conventional to the general *mañjarī* schema, but the specific choice of *mañjarī* is interesting: Sampūrṇā Mañjarī. The name *Sampūrṇā*, meaning "complete" or "completely full," is etymologically relevant to the discussion of the three ways Kṛṣṇa manifested in Nadīyā that weaves throughout both of the texts Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī has published. I will return to this extremely significant assignment in the next section, on ASA.

Next Devakīnandana tells us that the fourth of Advaita's *sādhanā* roles was that of Vasudeva's son, who is Pūrṇatara[12] Kṛṣṇa, the second order appearance

of Kṛṣṇa. King Vasudeva, husband of Queen Devakī, was Kṛṣṇa's biological father. Forced by political circumstances and abetted by magic, he smuggled their newborn infant Kṛṣṇa out of the dungeon in which the couple had been imprisoned by Devakī's evil brother Kaṁśa and entrusted the child to a humble cowherding couple in Vraja, Nanda and Yaśodā. Once Kṛṣṇa enters Vraja he becomes Pūrṇatama, the "most complete" manifestation of divinity. So if Advaita is Vasudeva's son, he represents Kṛṣṇa's initial arrival on earth, into a royal family. That is to say, he is the embodiment of the starting point of the devotional continuum, majesty. Kṛṣṇa the butter thief of Mathurā is the focus of much devotional activity, but that mischievous boy nonetheless began life as a prince. And that prince would never have come to live in Mathurā had he not been Vasudeva's son. Thus, despite the grammatical technicalities, it can be argued that Pūrṇatara Kṛṣṇa is even more important than Pūrṇatama, the "most complete" Kṛṣṇa. In any case, Pūrṇatara Kṛṣṇa is the requisite predecessor for the Pūrṇatama manifestation, that of the flute-playing playboy of Vraja. This issue becomes an important point for later generations of Advaita's disciples, who will need theologically based arguments to fuel their claim of Advaita's indispensability and their more subtly made claim that he was more divine than Caitanya.

Devakīnandana reports one other *sādhanā* identity for Advaita, that of Sadāśiva. This choice of a god rather than a participant in the drama of Vraja is the most anomalous, yet not entirely inconsistent with the familiar images of Advaita Ācārya. We know from other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts, both those treating Advaita Ācārya (i.e., *Advaita Maṅgala*) and those treating Caitanya (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta*) that Advaita was unanimously (though not exclusively) viewed as an embodiment of Sadāśiva. As noted previously, Sadāśiva is the fivefold first evolute from the *niṣkāla* (timeless) Paraśiva.[13] Art historian Doris Srinivasan reports that "Sadāśiva is the godhead on the way to full manifestation—the formless as it begins to assume form."[14] He is thus the midpoint, the unfolding of divinity in progress. Srinivasan's research has convinced her that this three-part Śaiva doctrine had spread throughout India by the eighth century and she mentions that we find descriptions of Sadāśiva in two texts influential in Bengal, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* and the *Uttarakamikāgama.*[15] It is entirely reasonable to suppose that the Gauḍīyas were familiar with this Śaiva material and equated Advaita Ācārya with Sadāśiva quite deliberately to highlight his indispensable role in Kṛṣṇa's descent into Bengal.

Śiva is most often portrayed as somewhat aloof from the world, sitting immovably in meditation, presenting a majestic and awesome sight to his disciples. Thus this role, like that of Pūrṇatara Kṛṣṇa, confirms Advaita's position at the starting point of Bengali devotionalism.

As we will see consistently with the major hagiographies treating Advaita, his own religious inclinations were probably quite conservative. That conservatism allowed the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to make him their bridge between tradition and their new, exuberant devotionalism. And this man standing at the starting point of the devotional continuum launched the entire movement when he forced Kṛṣṇa to take human birth in Bengal.

Further, the political implications of this metaphorical entailment are clear: Śiva, who already had numerous competing followers in Bengal, is worshipping Kṛṣṇa, who is the newcomer to the region. In other words, the image can be read as an indication that, as Tennyson wrote in a different context, "the old order changeth, yielding place to new."[16] The very powerful and ancient god is ceding his place to the younger Kṛṣṇa but does not disappear. Rather he remains very much a part of the emerging movement.

Devakīnandana devotes almost as much attention to Sītā's practices as he does to those of her husband. The granting of *mañjarī sādhana* practice to a woman was very unusual, and in and of itself highlights Sītā's tremendously important, and unique, role in her husband's lineage.[17] Sītā Devī worshipped, visualizing herself in the *sādhana* identities of Ādiśakti, Yogamāyā, and Kanaka Sundarī.

Ādiśakti, literally "the primeval force," is the divine embodiment of primeval power, which is feminine. Ādiśakti is also the consort of (Sadā) Śiva, so we find a nice coherence between the assignments of Sītā as the one and her husband as the other. These two meditation assignments are mutually fully consistent. Further, Ādiśakti brings with her the same notion of priority discussed above, for her raw power must be present before creation can emanate from it. That is to say, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa could not have taken human birth as Caitanya without her presence and assistance.

Sītā is also Yogamāyā, who fulfills the same function in the Kṛṣṇa cosmology as Ādiśakti does vis-à-vis Śiva. Here, however, we have a slight but significant divergence. Yogamāyā, Kṛṣṇa's magical power, always precedes him into mundane existence. That image certainly fits the idea of Advaita and Sītā arriving before Kṛṣṇa. This falls apart though, if Advaita is the Kṛṣṇa whom she must precede, when we note that Sītā was much younger than her husband. However, where the elements do cohere is at the level of the metaphors themselves and not in the people who take on the particular roles. That is, her Yogamāyā is an appropriate counterpoint to her husband's Pūrṇatara Kṛṣṇa as Vāsudeva,[18] as both (but she before him) appeared in the evil king Kaṁśa's dungeon where their parents had been imprisoned. We may, however, read this postulation somewhat differently and understand Sītā's Yogamāyā not in relation to her husband but in relation to Caitanya, in preparation for his advent. This reading makes more sense with this single *mañjarī* assignment. By giving Sītā an important role, in which she

acts independently, the author broadens her impact on the tradition as a whole. Thus as Yogamāyā Sītā precedes Caitanya (Kṛṣṇa) to earth.

Last, Sītā worships Kṛṣṇa in the role of Kanaka Sundarī. This "Golden Beauty" is not one of the *mañjarīs*, but she is instrumental in facilitating the loveplay of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. She is not mentioned outside of the Advaita Ācārya corpus, so we cannot draw from any body of sectarian common knowledge about her, but in his *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* Haridāsa Dāsa describes her simply as Rādhā's maidservant. Thus Kanaka Sundarī operates in the devotional mood of servitude in relation to Rādhā, and is moving toward the mood of friendship. Kanaka Sundarī may well be an epithet for Rādhā herself, who is so often described in terms of her golden complexion.

The inclusion of so many details about Sītā's practices signals her tremendous importance to Advaita's lineage. We know that she became a guru herself after her husband's death and initiated disciples with various mantras. Devakīnandana's description of Sītā's own practices lets us know that she was as well-regarded by the community as a man in that position would have been. Further, the specific *sādhanā* assignments signal that her husband took her just as seriously for her sectarian role as for her mundane roles as his wife and surrogate mother to his disciples.

In fact AUD brings to light a number of interesting points. First of all, although he never tells us this, the author is probably a grandson of Advaita Ācārya, the son of Advaita's son Balarāma's third wife (of four).[19] We know from various genealogical accounts that Balarāma had a son named Devakīnandana. Throughout the text Devakīnandana mentions his allegiance to his own gurus Kṛṣṇa Miśra and Balarāma and quotes repeatedly from their writings (which unfortunately seem to have vanished without a trace, as I can find neither references to such works in any of the standard sources nor any listings in manuscript catalogues). We know from other sources[20] of a rift in the family between those who thought of themselves as devotees of Caitanya, whom they viewed as God Himself (*Svayaṁ Bhagavān*), and those who felt that Advaita was the embodiment of Kṛṣṇa, to be worshipped above Caitanya.[21] Kṛṣṇa Miśra belonged to the former group, while Balarāma belonged to the latter. Devakīnandana in AUD clearly describes his own allegiance to Balarāma, and hence places himself in the Advaita-as-supreme camp. Subal Candra Maitra, a Shantipur Vaiṣṇava scholar and devotee of Advaita Ācārya, reports[22] that the Advaita-supremacists ultimately died out. Kāmadeva Nāgara, one proponent of this view, found living in Nadīyā too difficult for his philosophy and moved north to Assam to try to spread the doctrine there, but eventually the group simply died out.[23] In any case, to my knowledge no Advaita-as-supreme faction remains, in Bengal or anywhere else.

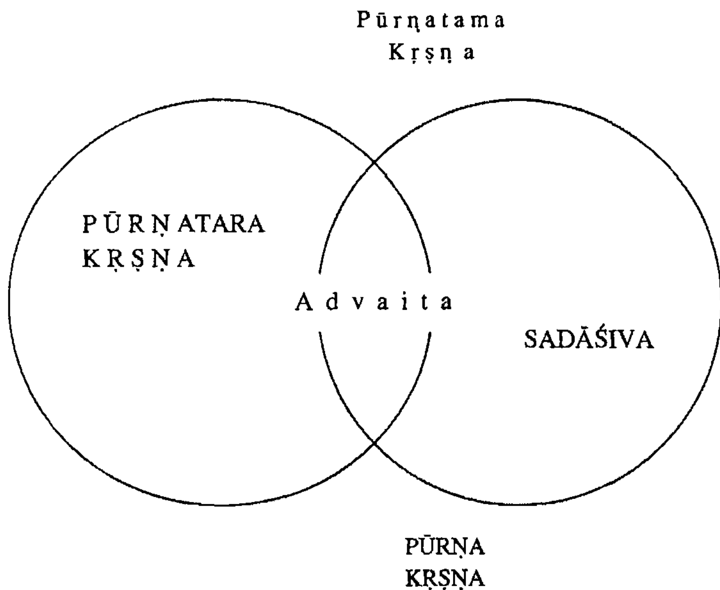


FIGURE 3.1. *Overlapping Concepts of Divinity in Advaitoddeśa Dīpikā*

Advaita Svarūpāmṛta

Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī published Kānudeva Gosvāmī's *Advaita Svarūpāmṛta* (ASA) in the same booklet as the above-mentioned *Advaitoddeśa Dīpikā*. The text, like AUD, remains extant in two manuscripts, one at BSP (No. 2895, missing its second folio) and the other at Kolkata University (No. 1420, dated 1673 C.E.), and appears to be simply an elaboration on AUD, treating the *mañjarī sādhanā* identities mentioned above in much greater detail. Kānudeva also extols the virtues of the controversial practice known as *parakīya prema* ("love with another's [spouse]").[24] He claims that Advaita Ācārya worshipped in this mode. Kānudeva quotes extensively from other Vaiṣṇava texts, most of which I have been able to locate and verify. He uses such standard sources as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, as well as the *Caitanya Candrodaya Nāṭaka*, and frequently cites Advaita's contemporary and devoted disciple Yadunandana as well as Advaita's sons Kṛṣṇa Miśra and Balarāma. He also uses material from the mysterious *Padma Purāṇa*, a text extant in several versions in both Sanskrit and Bengali, many authors whose quotations from which elude scholars' searching.[25]

The author of the ASA gives Advaita Ācārya the identities of (Pūrṇatara) Kṛṣṇa, Sadāśiva, and Sampūrṇā Mañjarī, while Sītā Devī is Ādiśakti, Kanaka Sundarī, Rādhā, Paurṇamāsī, and Yogamāyā. He describes the ages, complexions, duties, and clothing of these roles in detail. The guru provides this information to the disciple as part of his instruction in the practice, to assist him in his meditative visualization. These lists are a bit different than those given in AUD for Advaita and Sītā, and here it becomes even more clear that both Advaita and Sītā, in their *sādhanā* practices, engage in devotional activity in relation to each other as well as in relation to Kṛṣṇa. They are a team in every sense. And given the very purpose of this practice, which is to become increasingly intimately involved with Kṛṣṇa, if the author then tells us they practiced with each other, he is letting us know that this couple, too, is divine. The early works on Advaita rarely make this claim as boldly as does Kānudeva.

The author of the ASA writes, "Sampūrṇā Mañjarī was one of the *mañjarīs*, and Rādhā relied on her service during lovemaking."[26] He provides much more information than did Devakīnandana, so that now the relationships among the various meditation identities become clearer.

Slightly later, in a quote from Balarāma Gosvāmī,

> Where Kṛṣṇa rests from his sport, Rādhā appears for the appropriate service in the bower. Without the *sakhīs* in the bower Sadāśiva gets no service; Mahāśakti is his eternal nature. Kanaka Sundarī serves the couple Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their loveplay. Ādyāśakti bears the name "Kanaka Sundarī" and Sadāśiva performs as Sampūrṇā Mañjarī. In one private manifestation Rādhā is Ādyāśakti, and in one manifestation Sadāśiva is no different from Kṛṣṇa.[27]

This is a passage actually describing Advaita's and Sītā's behavior during their *sādhanā*, and demonstrates how the two would move from one role to another. Kṛṣṇa is equated with Sadāśiva, who must be served by Kṛṣṇa's female companions. *Mahāśakti* is a term interchangeable here with *Ādyāśakti*, who is Sītā. And the couple also enact the roles of the two young women, Kanaka Sundarī (Sītā) and Sampūrṇā Mañjarī (Advaita). And just to make certain his readers have grasped all this, Balarāma makes his final and quite explicit statement: "Sadāśiva is no different from Kṛṣṇa."

Next we find a very revealing quotation from Kṛṣṇa Miśra:

> In Dvāpara Yuga Mahāviṣṇu was known as Sadāśiva, who has as his chief object Kṛṣṇa's *pūrṇatara vilāsa*. Mahāśakti is Rādhā, his Hlādinī in Vraja, her own form a mine of Kṛṣṇa's love. She experienced in a separate body, then Ādyāśakti appeared as Kanaka Sundarī. In this way they both served as companions in the bower.[28]

Kṛṣṇa Miśra's statements are clear. Never before, however, have we been told that in the last great age, Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva were one and the same. His making the two names interchangeable detracts from the image of Advaita Ācārya as the joint embodiment of the two, but the suggestion that the two gods are one in the first place is quite intriguing, since it applies to Advaita, whose name can be translated (among other ways) as "not-two."

And,

> When Hari saw his lovely self among the cowherders he said, "Dear Rādhā, your sweetness is all-pervasive." And so Kṛṣṇacandra appeared as Gaurāṅga. That Rādhā appeared with the name of Sītā. As Yogamāyā she enables Kṛṣṇa's sport.[29]

And

> Rādhā was known as Ādyāśakti in ancient times, and that Rādhā has manifested as the one called Sītā.[30]

Kānudeva provides details about the *mañjarī* assignments. These enable us to see how elaborate these meditation practices are. For example, Sampūrṇā's parents are Ratnabhānu and Jayakīrttī, and her husband is Sukaṇṭha. She is thirteen years and nine and a half months of age, born on the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Māgha (as was Advaita himself). She has a golden complexion, wears blue clothing, and serves betel to the divine couple during their trysts.

Kanaka Sundarī is thirteen years and three months of age, born on the fourth day in the bright fortnight of the month of Bhādra. She is also sometimes called Kandarpa Sundarī because Kṛṣṇa could see that she was eager to serve him alone.

Even more interesting is Kānudeva Gosvāmī's addition of two very significant names to the roster of roles for Sītā: Paurṇamāsī and Rādhā. Paurṇamāsī fits what we know about Sītā herself, because Paurṇamāsī was the elderly woman, perhaps Rādhā's aunt, who conspired with the young divine couple to arrange their trysts in Vraja. She was thus responsible for the union of the pair. Sītā was about the same age as Śacī, Caitanya's mother, and as Advaita's wife can be seen as sharing her husband's responsibility for the union of the divine couple in the person of Caitanya, the dual incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This is thus neither a surprising nor in any way a controversial postulation.

Far more intriguing, however, is the announcement that Sītā worshipped as Rādhā. If she is Rādhā we would then expect her husband to worship as the

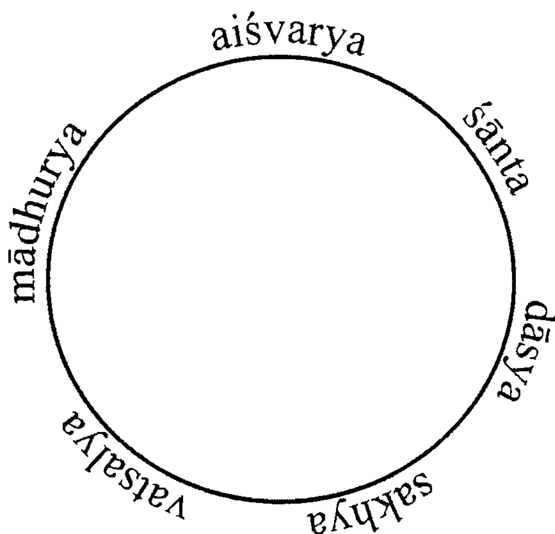


FIGURE 3.2. *The Devotional Circle*

Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, but he does not; he is rather the pre-Vraja Kṛṣṇa. The two figures are not parallel. Why has our author chosen to use asymmetrical images here? Can he have simply made a mistake, or is something else at play?

One rather unlikely possibility is that in his view Pūrṇatara Kṛṣṇa is not the infant born in Kaṁśa's prison, but actually the Kṛṣṇa who charmed the hearts of the women of Vraja, the Kṛṣṇa to whom one relates not in the intermediate stage of *vatsalya*, but in the highest stage of *mādhurya*. That is to say, he is claiming that Advaita, whom he earlier equated with Pūrṇatara Kṛṣṇa, is the highest manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. And the female consort of that form must be Rādhā. If this reading is accurate, then the author is collapsing the devotional continuum so that its opposite ends are the same. He has made the continuum into a circle, with neither beginning nor end. That is a remarkable theological leap! Advaita Ācārya's followers in the mainstream of his group would hesitate to make this claim, as it eclipses the importance of Caitanya himself. Yet here in ASA, produced by a marginal figure in Advaita's school, we find it. Those on the margins would seem to have greater freedom of philosophical and theological expression, merely by virtue of their status far outside the centre of sectarian power.

Another possibility is that this asymmetry is deliberate, and Kānudeva is subtly telling us that Rādhā, i.e., Sītā, is the more powerful force in the couple. In chapter 2 I discussed another attempt, from the *Advaita Maṅgala*, to postulate Sītā as

Rādhā, in a metaphorical entailment that also does not seem to succeed. The very postulation of this odd juxtaposition suggests that in some cases authors were testing the waters to see how far they could go in expressing unorthodox, or even simply new, ideas. And even the idea of Advaita as a full manifestation of Kṛṣṇa would be considered heretical in most Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava circles. This text, like the others discussed in this chapter, has been ignored by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava mainstream, and certainly these propositions play a role in that.

In any case, less controversial is the idea of divinity distributing a single aspect of itself over several different bodies. Kānudeva Gosvāmī tells us that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa incarnated twice in Kali Yuga, once jointly in the form of Caitanya and again in Sītā and Advaita, respectively. Later, he says that Kṛṣṇa distributed half his body to Rādhā and then half of what remained to Anaṅgā Mañjarī[31] and Sampūrṇā Mañjarī, respectively.

Clearly Sītā is a significant player here. She is also senior to the only other woman who could possibly be viewed as her competition, namely the wife of Caitanya's left-hand man, Nityānanda: Jāhnavī Devī. Kānudeva Gosvāmī tells us that Sītā is the guru of Advaita's junior wife Śrī, and of Jaṅgalī and Nandinī.[32] Also listed are Advaita's students Kāmāi, Purāi, Īśāna, Śyāmadāsa, and Viṣṇudāsa, of whom Kāmāi and Purāi were the leaders; and Śaṅkara,[33] whom Advaita Ācārya renounced.

The text also mentions Nityānanda,[34] whose *sādhanā* identities were Balarāma and Anaṅgā Mañjarī.[35] The equation of Nityānanda with Balarāma is standard, but the inclusion of a positive image of Nityānanda in a text treating Advaita Ācārya is unusual and significant. Because many of the biographical works (of Caitanya as well as of Advaita) describe quarrels between these two leaders, mention of Nityānanda in a text of this sort would suggest some resolution of the conflict, or at least an attempt to minimize any suggestion of hostility between the two leaders and/or their disciples. But while we find mention in ASA of Sītā, and some discussion of her practices and her role in the community, along with those of Advaita and Advaita's sometime competitor, Nityānanda, Kānudeva ignores Nityānanda's wife Jāhnavī, except in the most veiled of references. And yet members of the Nityānanda *vaṁśa* (lineage) claim that she, like Sītā, became a leader in her own right following the death of her husband. This appears to be an example of the usual Gauḍīya damning by silence.

Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī must have chosen to publish *Advaitoddeśa Dīpikā* and *Advaita Svarūpāmṛta* together because they are so similar, in terms of both structure and content. They were probably composed around the same time in the seventeenth century, though it is impossible to determine which is older and whether one author deliberately borrowed from the other. Both texts use brief selections from earlier Vaiṣṇava materials to make certain points, so we know

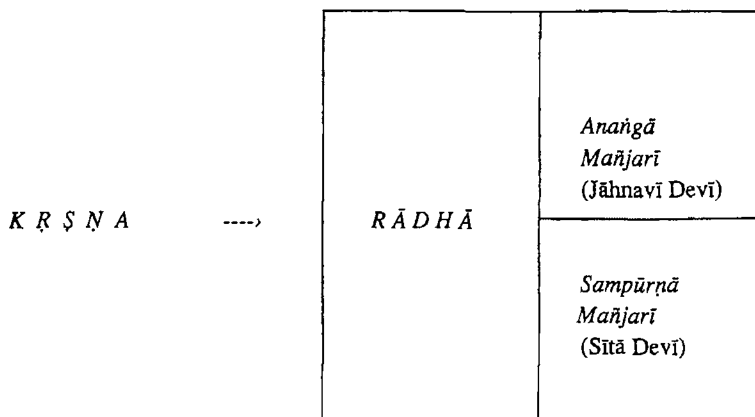


FIGURE 3.3. *Distribution of divinity in Advaitasvarūpāmṛta*

they were composed later than those works their authors cite. Often the authors choose passages specifically describing Advaita and his theological identity, and/or his relationship to Kṛṣṇa, or in connection with a more abstract notion. For example, Kānudeva quotes several times from a text he calls the *Sanatkumāra*, which must be the *Sanatkumārīya Tantra*.[36] According to one of the citations from the *Sanatkumāra*, Kṛṣṇa himself whispered the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa mantra into the right ear of Sadāśiva (whom we are to understand to be Advaita Ācārya). As occurred years later when Caitanya initiated Advaita with the thirty-two-syllable Hare-Kṛṣṇa mantra, in AUD the younger figure instructs his elder. Thus purified by the mantra, Advaita is ready to begin his meditative visualization, and Kṛṣṇa instructs him to worship as one of Rādhā's girlfriends.

At this point Kānudeva switches from the *Sanatkumāra* to the words of Kṛṣṇa Miśra Gosvāmī.[37] Immediately after Kṛṣṇa Miśra's two Sanskrit verses, the text switches to a Bengali interpretation of them, in which we learn[38] that Mahāviṣṇu is Sadāśiva, who is completely devoted to Kṛṣṇa, and that his consort Mahāśakti (interchangeably called Ādyāśakti) is Rādhā. Thus Mahāviṣṇu was both the Kṛṣṇa of Mathurā, and his own devotee Sadāśiva. Similarly Ādyāśakti also appeared as a third person, Rādhā's companion Kanaka Sundarī.

The theology of this section is conflated with the usual Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava view of Caitanya as Kṛṣṇa, and/or as Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, who incarnated in Nadīyā to experience his own sweetness, which Rādhā experienced with him in Vraja. In Kānudeva's view this accurately describes Caitanya's theophany but is equally true of Advaita and Sītā. Or rather, almost equally true, as Kṛṣṇa is progressively and in ever greater increments manifesting himself in Nadīyā before Caitanya

arrives as the complete manifestation of divinity. That is, Kṛṣṇa shared two bodies in Nadīyā, first that of Advaita, and, much later, that of Caitanya. And Rādhā appeared first as Sītā and later as Caitanya. Thus the couple, Advaita and Sītā, were jointly responsible for Caitanya's advent. Kānudeva states this very clearly near the end of ASA:

> Know that Gaurāṅga is the embodiment of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa,
> And realize that Sītā and Advaita are (also) the manifestation of that pair.[39]

To illustrate this graphically:

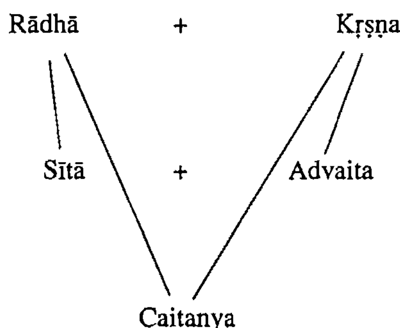


FIGURE 3.4. *Kānudeva's Theology*

The idea that Kṛṣṇa incarnates serially or multiply is not new. As suggested above, since he is God Himself (*Svayaṁ Bhagavān*), he is in no way diminished by these emanations and there is no limit to the number of Kṛṣṇas, or of partial forms of Kṛṣṇa, that can exist at any one time. Murārī Gupta, Caitanya's first hagiographer, describes the progressive manifestation of the eternal Vraja environment, in preparation for the incarnation (of Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu) of the age,[40] and Kānudeva's image of Kṛṣṇa himself as part of that environment is not inconsistent with other sectarian theology. ASA more than other texts plays with this notion of serial and multiple descents of the same overarching divine force. Thus here we find that Kṛṣṇa sends down parts of himself as the advance guard to prepare the way for his own full manifestation yet to come.

These practices attributed to Advaita Ācārya in these two texts are quite reminiscent of those attributed to him in the *Advaita Maṅgala*.

I turn now to a third text treating Advaita's *mañjarī sādhanā*.

Nitāi-Advaita-Tattva

Nitāi-Advaita-Tattva (NAT) is unpublished and extant in one short (four folios) manuscript[41] whose author is Kṛṣṇadāsa.[42] The text is very interesting for its even-handed treatment of the apparent rivals, Nityānanda and Advaita Ācārya. The two receive equal time in this composition, as its title implies, although a close examination reveals the hierarchy the author assumes though does not describe explicitly.

Kṛṣṇadāsa opens his work by announcing that he will describe the ways the two worshipped in each of the four devotional moods. He emphasizes the essential roles each played in Nadīyā, and by way of ostensibly demonstrating that the two leaders are equally important, proclaims that devotees need one at each hand to pull them across the perilous ocean of existence. Delivering the same message via different metaphors, Kṛṣṇadāsa tells us that Advaita and Nityānanda are matter (a feminine force in Indian cosmology) and spirit (masculine) respectively, the two components of creation that interact to generate the entire phenomenal universe. Both elements must be present for creation to manifest; neither can function in the absence of the other. In the worldview operating here, however, the masculine is always superior in the hierarchy. Thus the author does not tell us that he favors one of the two leaders over the other; rather he allows that preference to be implicit in the way he constructs his text and describes the two.

Particularly striking is the text's assertion that Nityānanda and Advaita occupied a single body in Vraja, that of Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Balarāma.[43] And since that eternal Vraja both precedes and coexists with its manifestation in Nadīyā, Kṛṣṇadāsa would seem to want us to view the Bengali leaders as two aspects of the same divine figure.

Balarāma, the author tells us, served Kṛṣṇa in three of the four moods: servitude, friendship, and parental affection, and Nityānanda and Advaita, as Balarāma, did likewise. But Nityānanda and Advaita occupied other bodies in Vraja as well, in which they served Kṛṣṇa in the erotic mood, thereby completing the continuum of devotion and arriving at the ideal relationship with their lord. For their service in this latter mood they became differentiated into two of Rādhā's closest associates, her sister Anaṅgā Mañjarī (Nityānanda) and her friend Tūlasī Mañjarī (Advaita), to whom Rādhā revealed her most secret emotions. These two assisted in the loveplay of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. These female roles for the two more closely fit the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ideal in which Kṛṣṇa is the only male.

These roles, however, differ from what we read in *Advaita Svarūpāmṛta*, whose author includes Sītā in his schema, and by implication, Jāhnavī. Here in NAT the two men are given *mañjarī* identities, with Nityānanda given the identity else-

where given to his wife, but we find no mention at all of either Nityānanda's or Advaita's wife.

NAT is probably the least significant, as well as the shortest, of the texts discussed in this chapter. As mentioned above, it is extant in only one manuscript. To my knowledge is not mentioned in any other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava work, so one can safely deduce that it had no serious impact on sectarian philosophy. Nonetheless the assertion in the text that Advaita and Nityānanda must both be honored by those interested in reaching Kṛṣṇa, and the couching of that message in the image of the two as Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Balarāma, is politically very interesting given all the suggestions elsewhere in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature of the differences between the two and, later, between the groups each led, which continued after their deaths.

Ritual

The next group of texts also treats Advaita Ācārya's alleged spiritual practices but differs dramatically from those discussed previously. Sītā does not appear in these compositions (at least, she is not specifically named), and we find that Advaita has moved out of the realm of visualizing himself assisting in the loveplay of the divine pair into actually participating in these activities. These texts describe actual sexual practices through which Advaita, according to the authors, worshipped Kṛṣṇa.

Three different texts bearing the name *Advaita Sūtra Kaḍacā* ("Advaita's Notebook of Rules") each attribute different spiritual practices to Advaita Ācārya. All three are extant only in manuscript form, and, as is the case with the rest of the Advaita corpus, none has previously been subjected to scholarly scrutiny outside India.

These texts are explicitly *sahajiyā*[44] and purport to be excerpts from Advaita's own notebook. In the first of these[45] Advaita Ācārya questions Mādhavendra, his guru, about *sahajiyā* practices. The guru expresses amazement that Advaita, whom he addresses as Sadāśiva,[46] can ask such questions, since he must by definition be omniscient.

More manuscripts of this AKS remain extant than of any other text devoted to Advaita Ācārya. AKS opens with homage to the six *gosvāmīs*, by name, as well as to Caitanya, Nityānanda, and Advaita and their respective disciples. The frame story of the text involves Mādhavendra Purī's unexpected arrival in Nadīyā from Vṛndāvana. First he visits the Miśra home in Navadvīpa, where he blesses the very pregnant Śacī, and then he goes to Advaita Ācārya's house in Shantipur. Advaita receives him with great warmth and affection and begs his guru to give

him the great seven-syllable mantra.[47] Once he receives the mantra, Advaita asks for further religious instruction. Purī begins by explaining that Kṛṣṇa's name is all-important in this degenerate Kali Yuga. And, with that introduction and an admonishment to keep the right sort of company, Mādhavendra Purī begins to explain his teachings, bestowing on his disciple the *kāma gāyatrī* mantra[48] as the first step in his education.

The standard *gāyatrī* mantra is a twenty-four-syllable prayer for enlightenment. The guru bestows this mantra on a young person at his formal initiation into adulthood, and historically knowledge of it was restricted to upper-caste males.[49] This particular mantra, considered the most sacred of all, was always kept secret and never recited publicly. Variations from the standard formula using the twenty-four-syllable *gāyatrī* meter beseech different deities for slightly different purposes. The *kāmā gāyatrī* mantra, which is the basic *sahajiyā* mantra, is a prayer to the god of love. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja also mentions[50] that this *mantra* is the proper one with which to worship the Madana Gopāla form of Kṛṣṇa:

> May we realize Lord Kāma.
> Let us meditate on the one who wields the flower arrows.
> May that disembodied one enlighten us.

Purī outlines the course of *sahajiyā* practice with its three stages, beginning (*pravartta*), intermediate (*sādhaka*), and accomplished (*siddha*). The beginner has received only instruction in *kāma gāyatrī* and the recitation of the Name of Kṛṣṇa.

At the beginning stage of the "accomplished" level the aspirant learns to envision himself as female even though he is really male. That conception then allows him to worship Kṛṣṇa in the mood of the young cowherd girls of Vraja who were his frequent companions and paramours, very intimate with Krsna. Eventually the aspirant perfects his practice until the guru deems him a true adept.

Most of these practices are meditative visualizations. Beyond that, Mādhavendra Purī said, there are actual physical practices as well as the mental ones. The physical practices involve sexual ritual performed with a partner.[51] While the devoted practitioner serves the body of his partner in erotic ways, Purī continues, his penis does not become erect, because he has no desire in his heart.[52] If he does have desire, everything is lost, for the goal is Kṛṣṇa's pleasure, not one's own. The devotee progresses through ever more involved acts of sexual service until finally, drawing on Kṛṣṇa's desire, he does engage in what the author terms "desireless (sexual) union" with his partner. The sexual activity is "desireless" in that the devotees are not satisfying their own physical desires but seek to give pleasure to the object of their devotion, Kṛṣṇa.

Mādhavendra Purī concludes the text by putting it into perspective in terms of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa loveplay. He reminds his listeners of the well-known Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava doctrine that Kṛṣṇa's desire to experience what Rādhā feels with him impelled him to take birth in Kali Yuga (i.e., in the text's own present) to spread the cult of devotion to himself. Making the work even more immediate, Purī reports that Kṛṣṇa sent Advaita ahead as his commander-in-chief to introduce devotion. Advaita had two important lieutenants in this campaign: Brahmā, in the form of Haridāsa Ṭhākura, and later, Balarāma as Nityānanda. Thereafter all of Hari's friends and associates in Vraja would come to Nadīyā, and finally, at the signal of Advaita's mighty roar, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa themselves would arrive, united in the single body of Caitanya.

The second AKS[53] is a sole exemplar, in fairly poor condition, and so is difficult to read. It seems to be a compilation by a single scribe of several short but related texts, the last of which is AKS. This AKS seems to be a discourse on *parakīya* praxis and philosophy, with much technical discussion about energy centers and bodily fluids. The extended discussion of somatic hydraulics is very typical of *sahajiyā* literature. The aspirant learns to perform sexual ritual with a female partner, in which he must not ejaculate but instead learn to retain his fluids and retract them against the current, upstream, to energy centers (*cakras*) in the head. Advaita's name appears only in the colophon, with the title of the work, and nowhere in the body of the text. This leads me to conclude that this single manuscript was mislabeled by a scribe and does not properly belong in the Advaita corpus, so I will not discuss it further.

A third text named AKS takes the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Pārvatī, and, like the other two, purports to come from Advaita Ācārya's own notebook. This composition discusses the various emotional moods in which a devotee worships Krsna; the sexual practice in which devotees' partners are the spouses of others in the attempt to recreate the ardent and risk-laden love the young housewife Rādhā bears for her lover Kṛṣṇa; and what Mādhavendra Purī refers to as Caitanya's "true identity." Unfortunately neither extant manuscript[54] of this particular text is complete.

All three of these compositions present challenges to the scholar. First, as is often the case in texts treating religious sexual practices, the authors seem to have been concerned that this material not fall into unqualified hands and so have taken several precautions to safeguard their work. The language makes no sense if one reads it literally, for the authors have sprinkled their texts with very complex metaphors. That situation in and of itself is nothing unusual. Many such texts treating secret practices can be found throughout South Asia. However, the specific words in which the sexual activities are encoded vary from text to text and are often so obscure as to defy comprehension. One can to some

extent compare the metaphorical entailments[55] of the various works to arrive at a murky understanding of what the author is trying to conceal, but full clarity without the complete texts and the guidance of an appropriate guru seems an unattainable goal. And that, of course, is precisely why they were composed so opaquely: these practices were not for the uninitiated.

While Advaita is elsewhere described as practicing *mañjarī sādhanā* and even of worshipping Kṛṣṇa via *parakīya prema*, only in AKS to we find specific information regarding his involvement in ritual sexual practices in his physical and not merely his meditational body. The text explicitly states that he performed these practices with his real, physical body. Further, the texts say repeatedly, the guru carefully teaches and supervises the practices, and one must not undertake them without that careful instruction. We learn that discussion of the practices remained within the circle of guru and disciples. We do not know how widespread these practices were, or how many guru-disciple circles might have been using them.

Given the lack of attention to these practices in mainstream Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature, and the secrecy in which they are shrouded even in the literature of their own school, it becomes clear that the *sahajiyā*s were viewed with some skepticism within the larger tradition. And yet we find more extant manuscripts of these *kaḍacā*s than of any other works in the Advaita corpus![56] Clearly, then, these materials enjoyed fairly wide circulation. In light of Advaita Ācārya's usual image as a very respectable pillar of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava society, how can we understand his apparent participation in these seemingly scandalous devotional activities?

Sahajiyā practitioners may have been seeking recognition and acceptance from other Vaiṣṇavas in the region. One way to accomplish this would be to demonstrate that a well-respected member of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community was also one of their own. No doubt they hoped that by adopting the very respectable name of Advaita Ācārya they might cast their practices in a more favorable light so that others might come to see them as more legitimate expressions of Vaiṣṇava devotion.

The evidence in South Asia contradicts the view of religious groups as necessarily monolithic, and guru lineages seem to be more important than lineages based on any given philosophy or practice. To be sure, the theologians of a given school can be expected to be its purists, presenting one stream of thought. But, because of the tendency to absorb previously existent viewpoints and subsume them under a new movement's philosophy, it is difficult to imagine how pristine a religious view it would even be possible to find in the region. And so the notion of individual gurus picking and choosing from among a wide variety of practices and philosophical sources clearly fits the preexisting regional pattern.

Any guru might take his theology and even his specific practices from more than one source, mixing and matching as suited the circumstances or his own interests. That being the case, it is not entirely outside the realm of possibility for Advaita to have indeed used some of the practices described. And while I strongly suspect that the presence of Advaita's name in these *sahajiyā* texts is a political ploy, the possibility that he did worship in that manner cannot be entirely discounted simply because we have no empirical evidence with which to prove or disprove it.

Let us turn now to the third group of minor texts, those which focus on the story of Advaita Ācārya's life.

Biography

At least two separate works bear the title of *Advaita Vilāsa (AV).*

Advaita Vilāsa (AV1)

The lengthier of the two is Vīreśvara Pramāṇika's *Advaita Vilāsa*, published in two volumes beginning c. 1899. Pramāṇika writes in his introduction that he culled his material from the many extant biographies of Advaita Ācārya. He cites as his sources Haricaraṇa Dāsa's *Advaita Maṅgala* as well as a Sanskrit text of the same name, which latter text I have been unable to locate,[57] *Bālya Līlā Sūtra*, *Advaita Prakāśa*, and *Advaita Tattva* (to be discussed in a later chapter); notes made by Kṛṣṇadāsa Brahmācārya (probably one of the *Advaita Kaḍacā Sūtras*); and the biographies of Caitanya. This author has produced the most complete biography of Advaita Ācārya to date by conflating the stories presented in the previous compositions and elaborating on their differences. Contrary to the common wisdom in this part of the world that the most complete text is the most authoritative, Vīreśvara's work has no standing whatsoever among the greater Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community, but several of Advaita Ācārya's Shantipur descendants told me it is the only authoritative biography on Advaita!

He does not, however, make any claims to special knowledge of his subject, and is straightforward about his composition's being a compilation and not his own original work. He brings no new theological insights to bear. Pramāṇika has remained faithful to his sources, with one important difference: he is the only writer to state specifically that Advaita Ācārya's mother Lābhā committed *sati* on her husband's funeral pyre.[58]

This is a startling revelation, and all the more so for a text published at the end of the nineteenth century, when the practice of *sati* was under assault

by both colonialists and Hindu reformers. What group advocated this ritual practice by which a grieving widow would die seated on her dead husband's lap in his cremation fire? In Bengal *sati* was encouraged for brahman widows, though how widespread the practice actually was is difficult to say. Nonetheless, some conservative brahmans seem to have believed that this type of death signaled tremendous piety.[59] The only other text to explicitly mention Lābhā's death is the BLS (see chapter 5), whose author writes that Lābhā and Kubera died at the same time and were whisked off to heaven in a flying flower-chariot. Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa may also be suggesting *sati* in a more metaphorical manner. Clearly Pramāṇika is glorifying Lābhā with this remark, demonstrating her unflinching ritual purity and adherence to the very strictest of brahmanical regulations. We have no way of knowing when this text was actually composed, but *sati* was outlawed in 1829, though discussion about it raged particularly ferociously during the period 1780–1833.[60] The practice continued (largely, though not entirely, among brahmans) despite British legislative intervention, and those who favored it clearly viewed it as redemptive for the women involved (though of course no one ever asked the women what their views on the subject were).[61]

The author reports that he composed this text because the other hagiographical materials on Advaita had become very difficult to find and the story of Advaita Ācārya's life and work needed to be told. His guru, Gopālacandra Gosvāmī, asked him to produce the work, at the request of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī, a tenth-generation descendant of Advaita who had moved into the Nadīyā area from Dhaka. Vijaya Kṛṣṇa had a large following himself, and his disciples believed him to be Advaita Ācārya returned. He had a strong impact in the area, and in fact revived interest in his ancestor. We will return to Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī in chapter 4, for his interest in Īśvara Pramāṇika's work is not insignificant and reflects the late nineteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava political scene. Pramāṇika's AV thus reflects the views of one Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school connected with Advaita Ācārya.

Advaita Vilāsa (AV2)

The second work entitled *Advaita Vilāsa,* composed by one Narahari Dāsa, is extant in two incomplete manuscripts held in the collection of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣaṭ.[62] We know nothing about this author. Haridāsa Dāsa, compiler of the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna,* tells us only that Narahari Dāsa is the author of AV and continues to say that "this little book is not very authoritative." However, this AV contains great detail about Advaita's childhood, with stories not found elsewhere.

Its first three and a half folios consist of formulaic verses in praise of an exhaustive list of members of the first and second generations of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community. This community's writers are notorious for mentioning the names of their contemporaries whose views they endorsed, and this author has condemned no one to the oblivion of omission. Finally Narahari begins to discuss Advaita Ācārya. He mentions early on that many stories about Advaita are available elsewhere, and that statement suggests that the text is not very old. Interestingly, Narahari does not tell his tale in strictly chronological order, though I will.

He begins by proclaiming that Advaita is Mahāviṣṇu descended to earth, and reminds us that other authors had previously made this same assertion. He describes a series of dreams that Kubera and Lābhā experienced, prior to Advaita's birth, predicting the important role the child would play in bringing Kṛṣṇa to earth in Kali Yuga, thereby ushering in an unstoppable wave of joy and causing Buddhists and Muslims to abandon their religions. He describes Advaita's birth in Navagrāma as the sixth son of Lābhā and Kubera, after four of their older sons had become renunciates. This differs from other accounts of Advaita's family, in which we learn that all of Advaita's older siblings died. The statement that Advaita's elder brothers all became renunciates reinforces the notion that our protagonist was born into a family of very pious brahmans. The author describes the family's subsequent relocation to Shantipur. Advaita is not actually born until the middle of the (incomplete) manuscript.

Narahari provides a lengthy picture of the visit of the Navagrāma brahmans and their wives to the newborn child and their collective delight in him. Narahari tells us that the whole town was blessed by his birth, and that the priests named the child Kamalākṣa. At that point (some fifty-two years before the birth of Caitanya) the infant cried out "Gaurāṅga! Gaurāṅga!"[63] to the amazement of those gathered. And as befits such a great devotee, he refused to eat any food which had not first been consecrated to Kṛṣṇa.

While it is impossible to determine the length of the original text and its complete contents, the folios we have treat little more than Advaita's childhood. We find one anecdote of the boy's visiting a Viṣṇu temple and, overcome with devotion, collapsing on the floor. Narahari has already told us that this child is Mahāviṣṇu, so we would expect something extraordinary to befall him in a Viṣṇu temple. The author makes no mention, however, of Advaita's interaction with the goddess, which we find elsewhere.[64] The two manuscripts are nearly identical, though No. 2886 is a bit longer and includes a bit of material on Caitanya. Both manuscripts are in good condition and appear relatively recent, though in both cases the language of the text is archaic.

Advaita Ācārya

Amiyakānti Datta, a Sylheti, published his *Advaitācārya* in 1929 from Kolkata through the Kulajā Sāhitya Mandira. His book is intended for children, to fill the apparent dearth, he writes in his introduction, of available material for children about great men. He based his book on the *Advaita Prakāśa*,[65] and it adds nothing to our intellectual understanding of Advaita's school. However, the mere fact that Datta saw the need to produce a biography of Advaita for children indicates that Advaita continued to be held in high regard, certainly among Sylheti Bengalis. His followers clearly wanted to ensure that their children knew about their illustrious and pious forefather.

PADĀVALĪ[66]

The last group of works I will consider in this chapter are the short lyric poems treating Advaita Ācārya of the genre collectively known as *padāvali. Padāvalī* literature has been tremendously popular in Bengal since its inception. In these short verses poets extol the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the playfulness of the infant Kṛṣṇa, the ecstasies of Caitanya, and the devotion of many members of Caitanya's entourage. Many of the *padāvalī* by numerous authors have been collected and published in voluminous anthologies. Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī has assembled a small collection of this literature treating both Nityānanda and Advaita, and published it in 1994 in a booklet he has called *Śrīśrī Nitāi-Advaita-Pada-Mādhurī.* He has collected poetry composed by such familiar writers as Vṛndāvana Dāsa, Locana Dāsa, Jñānadāsa, Narottama Ṭhākura, and others. Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī presents the works dedicated to Nityānanda and those to Advaita in two separate sections. He also indicates the original source of each poem and the musical mode in which it is to be performed (for these compositions are most often sung). Unfortunately he has neglected to provide a list of abbreviations for the popular anthologies from which he draws these poems, but one can reasonably guess, for example, that "P.K.T." is *Pada-kalpa-taru,* and "Gau. P.T." is *Gaura-pada-taraṅginī,* and "Bh.R." is *Bhakti Ratnākara,* all well known collections of the genre.

Most of these short poems are simply composed in praise of Advaita, capturing him in a moment of devotional fervor or portraying him as an object of devotion. These poems are significant for the very fact that several writers saw Advaita as a fit subject for their devotional poetry. He is described variously as the man whose boundless devotion to Kṛṣṇa and compassion for humanity

led him to bring in the incarnation for the age, but we find very little physical description of Advaita Ācārya. We do find standard descriptions of the type applied to any ardent Vaiṣṇava, such as of Advaita's body covered with horripilation during fits of devotional ecstasy[67] and of his "arms reaching his knees,"[68] a classic indication of spiritual elevation. This latter poet goes on in several verses to describe the infant Advaita with the standard images of greatness:

> With a very deep navel, he was exceptionally beautiful, and his
> eyes were as soft as lotuses and sparkled like jewels;
> Red feet, nails like mirrors, he was as beautiful as the moon;
> He bore the charming marks of a great man, and all who saw
> him were astonished.

This particular poem is unusual for its use of such strong, albeit stereotypical, visual imagery. Other poems describe Advaita's practices and the general mood he is believed to have created. For example, poem No. 2:

> Lost in love, my lord Sītā's Lord sat in meditation.
> Suddenly, what a mood came over him! With a tremendous roar
> he suddenly leapt to his feet.
> "I have brought him! I have brought him into the world! That
> man was born in Nadīyā to save the world!"
> With that he came to, dancing,
> Dancing with his staff raised above his head, with all the force of
> a mighty earthquake.
> All the men and women dance in delight with the Lord of Shan-
> tipur, as if they were in a market of bliss.
> Advaita's roaring rent the seven heavens, and the highest heaven
> began to buzz.
> Let the three worlds know of Mahāprabhu's advent.
> Balarāma's joy knows no bounds.[69]

Others, like poem 12, simply celebrate Advaita's advent, in much the same spirit as the birth of any great figure:

> On the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of
> Māgha, the ocean of great bliss burst forth.
> That moon Advaita descended from Lābhā's blessed womb at

the auspicious moment.
(His father) Kubera Paṇḍita was thrilled, and gave various gifts to brahmans and the poor.
He raced into the childbirth room and saw his son's face, and his heart rejoiced.
All the people of Navagrāma came running, and told each other they had never seen a child like this.
Miśra in his old age, as the result of his good deeds, got a jewel of a son like this.
The gods rained flowers down upon them; there has never been anything like it.
The sound "Victory! Victory!" filled the world. Ghanaśyāma proclaims this great glory.

Some, like Poem 13, are lists of Advaita's virtues:

Victory, Victory to the compassionate Advaita Ācārya, whose *huṁkāra*-roar caused Gaura's advent.
That ocean of compassion, bestower of love, Sītā's lord, by the strength of whose love came Gaurāṅga the lover,
By whose compassionate glance mercy arises; by the strength of whose love people sing Caitanya's virtues.
Whoever takes refuge at his feet will attain the great treasure of Gaura's love.
Who could not praise such a treasure of compassion? Locana says it is enough to knock Indra down from the heights.

Others, like poem 32, are purely descriptive:

My Lord Advaita the savior is the proud incarnation of Hari in Kali Yuga.
His lovely body is more beautiful than a garland of champa, its constant horripilation lights up the lineage.
He is completely overwhelmed by Gaura's love. His eyes are always flowing with tears.
He is mad with the joy of his amazing *sankīrtana*, which he indulges in day and night with his followers.
He sees that the vile ones are lost in despair, and his two arms reach out to them.

Give the jewel of devotion to all the people. Ignorant Narahari remains in delusion.

The poetry presents a strikingly different image of its subject than the other works covered in this chapter. We can safely speculate a bit about this situation. This material is found in large standardized anthologies that enjoy wide circulation throughout the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community, both at home in Bengal and further afield in the Vraja region. It is not a part of the Advaita corpus in the same way that the other materials discussed herein are. Few of these pieces were produced by members of Advaita's lineage or by people in any way connected with him, and so their authors' purpose is probably quite different. The poets are certainly praising Advaita Ācārya. They describe his great devotion and the activities that highlighted that devotion—dancing and singing, playing the drum as the hymn-singing processions flowed through the streets and towns of Nadīyā. But their praises center around Advaita's relationship to Caitanya, with very few exceptions, and make no theological claims that extend beyond that relationship. What we do find are consistent versions of the story of why he is important to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and that is for his role in ushering in the incarnation of the age.

The texts discussed in this chapter date for the most part from the early years of Advaita's school of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The greater Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition appears to have little interest in any activities of Advaita which did not involve Caitanya. And most of the *padāvalī* authors are a part of the larger tradition and not of Advaita's own lineage.

It is easy to imagine, then, that those with closer ties to Advaita Ācārya might have seen other and equally praiseworthy qualities in their leader. They would certainly have noticed that their own contingent was not as large as some of the other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava branches, and this may have also generated a serious concern that the other contributions their founder had made to Bengali civilization might be forgotten. They may also have observed a relaxation of social standards and a falling away from brahmanical ritual purity. Yet, with diminishing numbers, how could they ensure the survival of Advaita Ācārya's group and its reputation outside of his activities with Caitanya?

4

Revival and Return

THE HAGIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE TREATING Caitanya is vast, and before the age of printing, manuscripts of these works could be found in large numbers throughout the Bengali-speaking region. The Advaita tradition, in contrast, is quite fragmentary, with few extant manuscripts of any of the pieces, and those found in four separate parts of the region: Sylhet, Comilla, Kolkata, and Bhubaneswar. Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee lists a total of thirty-two manuscripts pertaining to Advaita, and seven pertaining to Sītā, in his *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts.* Thirteen of those are in the collections of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat, in Kolkata; only three were listed as in the holdings of the Sylhet Sāhitya Pariṣat (razed in 1992); one in Comilla, and three in Bhubaneswar (not too surprising given that city's proximity to the Jagannātha Temple located in Puri, itself a rich repository of Vaiṣṇava records). Bhattacharjee may have missed some libraries in East Bengal, but even allowing for that possibility, we can see that the bulk of materials were being produced, or at least maintained, in what is now West Bengal, eventually making their ways to the major manuscript libraries in the area. Shantipur and Navadvīpa, the twin homes of the Gauḍīya movement, do not have the sorts of libraries likely to collect and properly maintain these materials, so manuscripts found in these towns are likely to have been deposited at Śāntiniketan or one of the Kolkata libraries. But all these materials begin to appear late in the nineteenth century, coincidental with the rise of the nationalist movement throughout South Asia. In Bengal the intellectual community sought to recover its history with the production of literary historiography and the discovery of old texts that had largely been ignored for some time, and in some cases, had never before come to scholarly attention.

From the time shortly after Advaita's death until this period—for nearly two hundred years—we hear nothing new about Advaita Ācārya. His descendants

carry on, quietly, in Shantipur, maintaining the temples he and his sons established, but no new literature treating him appears. Until, that is, the end of the nineteenth century, when suddenly the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*[1] publishes news about the discovery of three new and previously unknown texts, all treating Advaita Ācārya. And meanwhile Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī, a tenth-generation descendant of Advaita Ācārya, appears in Shantipur, hailed by some as Advaita returned and by many more as Caitanya himself.

In this chapter I will discuss that nineteenth century revival, the political circumstances that fostered it, the institution without which it would not have happened, and two equally significant but very different figures responsible for the revival and the sustenance of Advaita Ācārya's name and school: Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī and Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi.

The nineteenth century was a time of intellectual resurgence in Bengal. Many scholars have written about the Bengal Renaissance[2] and the not entirely compatible nationalism that was sweeping the subcontinent. Indian intelligentsia were trying to come to grips with their own mixed heritage. Intellectual society was abuzz with the tension between the growing nationalist movement and the "outgoing universalism" of Tagore and others.[3] Many had been educated in English-medium schools and appreciated things European and, particularly, English. Meanwhile the nationalistic movement was encouraging scholars to recognize the intellectual beauty of their own culture's literary output. Sukumar Sen, writing in his (English-language) *History of Bengali Literature*, asserted that Bengali literature forced the "recognition of contemporary India as an equal partner in the assembly of the men of letters of the free and progressive world."[4] Sen, educated in both European and Indian institutions, was able to speak to scholars in both camps. He, and those who shared his views, saw his country's literati, specifically Bengali scholars, as on an equal footing with those of the rest of the world, whereas many colonialists insisted that South Asia (and, for that matter, the Arab world) had nothing to offer Europe. Perhaps the most memorable of those latter was Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose famous minute to the Governor-General's Council, adopted on March 7, 1835, stated, in part, "A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." Although Indian scholars (and many of their colonial rulers) knew better, even they were only just beginning to take vernacular and contemporary literature seriously as worthy of scholarly attention.

In the 1870s John Beames, an English administrator and linguist, urged the formation of an institution that would function for Bengal and Bengali, much like the Académie Française and similar European organizations, to standardize the Bengali literary language.[5] Nothing but a little discussion came of this idea for twenty years, and then in 1893 Binaykrishna Deb hosted the first meeting of

the Bengal Academy of Literature in his own home.[6] Kshetrapal Chakrabarti and Rameschandra Dutt, both Presidency College alumnae and active in Bengali literary society, were among its founding members. Another founding member, who was a student of Beames, was an Englishman named L. Liotard.[7]

These men shared the belief that Bengali literature deserved serious consideration by both scholars and literati and that it was time to standardize the language in which it was written. One problem they saw was the high degree of Sanskritization in Bengali literature. The use of Sanskrit, and the tendency to turn to Sanskrit when new technology demanded new vocabulary, resulted in the production of literature that was beyond the abilities of most Bengalis to understand.[8] At the other end of the spectrum Bengal Academy of Literature members also decried the use of village vocabulary, which they deemed vulgar or obscene.

At first the academy conducted its business, and produced its publications, in English. Before long the contradiction of this fact with the stated purpose of the organization became apparent, and so the membership decided to change its name to Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat and that of its journal to the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*. Shortly thereafter Mr. Liotard left the society.[9]

One of the issues facing Indian intellectuals of the day, and certainly those in Bengal, center of British administrative power in the region, was that many recently educated young people were "more interested in Europe than in India and Bengal."[10] To counter this trend and foster appreciation for Bengal's own literary output and intellectual capacities, Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat members called for a view that included "links to its ancient past, its choice of representative figures, its manner of interpreting works of the imagination and its appeal to the necessity of obedience manifested in epic virtue" and "was a model of manliness freed from the need for military prowess as the distinguishing sign."[11]

The writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, in an essay entitled "*Bāṅgalāra Itihāsa Sambandhe Kayekti Kathā*," urged Bengalis not to accept the British version of themselves and their own history.[12] Bankimchandra's vision may have been slightly different from what the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat was propounding. He used, among others, the lens of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature to construct his vision, while the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat's model was one of an authoritarian intelligentsia against the passively virtuous masses. The Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat model was a very rational one, almost devoid of poetic beauty.[13]

At this time Bengali intellectuals were at least trilingual, fluent not only in their mother tongue of Bengali but also in both English and Sanskrit. Thus other languages often influenced a writer's Bengali output, a situation now coming under harsh criticism from two distinct directions. Haraprasad Shastri believed that Bengali writers usually thought first in English (or even Sanskrit) and then

translated their thoughts into Bengali. Many Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat members encouraged writers to fight English-language influence and dealt with the Sanskrit question in terms of grammar and rhetoric.[14] Much more problematic for this group were writers they felt thought in English and drew their characters as English writers might, that is, depicted behavior that was not typical of Bengali culture.[15]

At the same time that writers were seeking to distance themselves from English literature and extolling the unique nature of Bengali literature, social critics were also trying to come to terms with what it meant to be a Bengali intellectual. The category of *bābu* had been used to describe those qualities of English-educated Bengalis from which many now sought to distance themselves.[16] Now, in the late nineteenth century, many intellectuals sought not only to distance themselves from the *bābus* but also to create a new Bengali identity. One way that some found to accomplish this was to decree that members of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat were *paṇḍitas* ("scholars"), bringing back into use a time-honored term that now applied not to Sanskrit scholars but to the new generation of Bengali scholars, just as concerned about proper representation of their discipline as the Sanskrit scholars had historically been. For them the term became a rhetorical device[17] that allowed them to make certain claims about their own intellectual credentials and their position in society. The first to make this claim in print was Bireshwar Pare, in an essay published in 1895 in the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*, though by then others had also been using the term to refer to any knowledgeable person.[18]

Pare and many others believed that all Bengali literature predating British presence was morally uplifting and focused primarily on the epics (many of this first wave of new literary thinkers viewed Vaiṣṇava literature as obscene). The call went out in 1894 for manuscripts of Krittibas' *Rāmāyaṇa*, with an eye to publication. However, as manuscripts began to come in, no two were the same. As more manuscripts materialized the membership recognized the need for some sort of formal collection policies and appointed first a manuscript curator and, later, a traveling manuscript collector. They followed procedures for Bengali manuscript collection already in effect with the Asiatic Society for their Sanskrit manuscript collection. Over time, as the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat took on the mission of collecting Bengali manuscripts, their scope widened beyond the epics, and by the turn of the century the society had amassed a collection of some seven thousand manuscripts.[19] This was all material that had somehow not come to the attention of the British in India, and much of it had been unknown to the English-educated Bengalis who were now collecting it. But initially the organization's focus had been on linguistic purity and whether Bengali writers should turn to Sanskrit or to English when in need of new vocabulary.

During this period archaeological excavations were in progress in the north and western parts of South Asia, but little of that sort in Bengal. Haraprasad Shastri continued to exhort his Bengali countrymen to dig out their own history in order better to understand the present. He felt one of the best ways to do this was through the collection of old manuscripts. However, as the mountains of manuscripts accumulated, very few scholars were actually reading this material.[20]

Among the manuscripts now flooding into the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat was much of the rich and varied literature Vaiṣṇava writers had produced during the four centuries since their movement's birth.

What then was the state of Vaiṣṇavism in the region by mid-nineteenth century? Tapankumar Raychaudhuri, writing half a century ago, noted that Advaita's subsect had always remained relatively strong in Bengal.[21]

> The followers of Advaita still constitute a considerable portion of the Vaishnava community in Bengal. Their present ways of life and thought as also the common traditions regarding their past agree in suggesting that they represented from the beginning a comparatively orthodox trend within the Vaishnava fold.[22]

Raychaudhuri has pinpointed the most important characteristic of Advaita Ācārya's school: their orthodoxy. Despite changing circumstances, the group managed to maintain their conservative brahmanical status at all times, despite the influx of outsiders and the pressures of a changing world.

With thinly veiled reference to such groups as the *sahajiyās*, discussed above in chapter 3, Raychaudhuri describes a split between so-called respectable Vaiṣṇavas, and the less respectable Vairāgīs,[23] going back to shortly after the time of Caitanya himself. Raychaudhuri claims that the tantric-yogic groups had become quite powerful and attracted many from the lower social classes.[24] He thus acknowledges the existence of the *sahajiyās* and other schools but dismisses them as having no influence on "proper" society. Those educated elites who had been influenced by Victorian English values were particularly averse to tantra.[25] However, the perceived need to distinguish themselves from these groups signals that the number of the various tantric/*sahajiyā* groups was significant. The influence of these controversial groups had grown significantly, bringing them to the attention of a wider and now even a foreign audience. They, in turn, were now subject to criticism from outside as well as from the "respectable" Vaiṣṇava ranks. That outside criticism no doubt fueled the desire of the more mainstream Vaiṣṇavas to distance themselves as far as possible from these groups.

The question of "respectability" could cut across caste boundaries, and the haste with which such authors as Raychaudhuri tell us that the *sahajiyās* and similar groups appealed to the lower social classes leads one to suspect that their attraction was in reality much broader. Otherwise these authors could have ignored them, for they would have posed no threat to the status quo. Clearly social stratification remained firmly in place both as Raychaudhuri was writing and in the years prior to that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism seems to have made no effort to shatter the caste system. But, while the mainstream Vaiṣṇavas held much more liberal attitudes to caste than those of the brahmanical orthodoxy in theory and practice, they never posed a direct threat to the age-old social organization.[26]

Members of Advaita's school were always orthodox and conservative, and their group remained relatively strong in Bengal. What, then, became of nonbrahman Vaiṣṇavas? We know that at least a few participated in the formation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, because their very anomalous presence requires a significant amount of space in the hagiographical material. Most often a protagonist will claim that Vaiṣṇava initiation confers brahmanhood on even the lowliest of people. Were no nonbrahmans present, such a concession would be unnecessary.

Raychaudhuri believes the nonbrahmans were absorbed into the *sahajiyā* movement. If so, that would seem to indicate some degree of recognition of the *sahajiyās* on the part of the larger group. On the other hand, Raychaudhuri's study may have included only brahmans, and thus other Vaiṣṇavas would have remained invisible to him. No doubt brahmans and nonbrahmans worshipped separately, as continues by and large to be the case today. The increasing need to separate the *sahajiyās* and other sexo-yogic groups from mainstream Vaiṣṇavism suggests that local religious practices were coming under fire, both from within their own orthodoxy and from the European rulers. Just how much did British politics in South Asia affect Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism?

Leonard Gordon notes that in the growing nationalist movement of the late nineteenth century politics and religion remained largely separated, though both cultural and religious revivalism were under way.[27] At the same time writers and scholars of literature had begun to champion the vernacular languages. This was particularly true in Bengal, where European ideas and linguistic influence could not be ignored. Certain religious organizations had become quite strong, but they had not yet begun to infiltrate the political realm. This was not the case in the late eighteenth century, however, when a great deal of political turmoil in Bengal had been instigated by armed groups of both Muslim and Hindu renunciates. Local peasants were also involved, though it is difficult to determine to what extent. The "holy men" clearly enjoyed widespread local support during the 1770 famine and the following years,[28] but these were not the Vaiṣṇavas of Nadīyā District, who remained aloof from such involvements.

We know that Nadīyā, an important intellectual center even before the time of Advaita, continued to flourish as a center of traditional brahmanical scholarship throughout most of its history. Even into the eighteenth century local rulers patronized the scholars of Nadīyā, helping to maintain the region's position as the most notable of centers of advanced Sanskrit study.[29] William Jones, a British civil servant who, unlike Macaulay, very much appreciated brahmanical erudition, referred to Nadīyā as "the celebrated university of Brahmans."[30] In 1829 local scholars ran twenty-five Sanskrit schools, each with up to sixty students, and most, just as in Advaita's day, specialized in the philosophical school known as *nyāya* (logic).[31] Devotionalism seems to have continued to be just as popular at this time as it was while Caitanya was living.[32]

Meanwhile the worship of the Mother Goddess, in her ferocious aspect, was growing in Bengal. Goddess cults have deep roots in Bengal, and indeed William Ward says that by the early nineteenth century most high-caste Bengalis were Śāktas. Śāktas and "quietist Vaishnavites,"[33] that is, vegetarian, nonviolent Vaiṣṇavas, fiercely debated the idea of ritual and blood sacrifice.[34] Nevertheless the goddess cults became somewhat respectable and were gaining brahmanical recognition, and through the brahmans, became absorbed into the greater "Hindu" tradition.[35] Many other cults flourished in the villages but were so localized that they never attained wider popularity or recognition.[36]

By the nineteenth century the devotional movement had largely become temple- and ritual-centered, regardless of the object of devotion.[37] Local landholders patronized builders of temples, writers (at this time the higher-caste elites were very literate, though few others could read or write[38]), and large public festivals. The amount of temple-building activity was particularly noteworthy. Architects now worked in terra cotta to design temples modeled on the traditional Bengali bungalow.[39] Many of these temples, especially around the town of Viṣṇupur, are still standing and active, covered with bas-relief scenes from the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

In the early 1800s the Baptist missionary complex appeared at Serampore, under the indomitable leadership of William Carey.[40] Their headquarters was some miles away from Kolkata; the East India Company regarded the missionaries as a threat and banned them from the city limits of Kolkata.[41] The conflict between the British officials, both of the company and of the Raj, whose main interest was in maintaining the local political stability that would allow their survival, and the Christian missionaries, fueled by their desire to save and reform through conversion, continued throughout British rule.[42] The greed that had brought the British to India now confronted such issues as the concern for South Asia's poverty-stricken millions, suddenly seen as in need of education and salvation. Christianity had be-

come a presence to be reckoned with, with the missionaries at Serampore running a thriving publishing industry as well as others already long established even in the remote areas of the northeast. By now also elite Bengalis were being educated in English-medium, usually missionary-run, schools, with a view to becoming civil servants in the British government. Consequently many educated Bengalis were very familiar with the Christian Bible. Meanwhile, by the mid nineteenth century the Brāhmo Samāja had begun moving into the countryside and now showed the influence of the "tolerant devotional traditions of Bengal *bhakti*."[43] The Samāja also clearly reflected the impact of Western notions in its practices and beliefs with such ideas as "the responsibility of the individual soul, the imminence of God . . . the irrelevance of caste and the possibility of achieving salvation through rational knowledge of the divine."[44]

Nemai Sadhan Bose described the complex interplay of Christian missionaries, conservative Hindus, and the reformers who had roots in both of the other camps.[45] Even the conservatives saw advantages in English education but fiercely refused to change their "socio-religious conservatism." Some Indian reformers, like the members of the Derozio-inspired Young Bengal, denounced Hinduism as ignorant superstition, unworthy of rational people.[46] These views were by and large the result of missionary harangue and proselytization. Later a reform movement within the Brāhmo Samāja would broaden that group's own mission and appeal. The Samāja, with its renunciation of idolatry and, eventually, of caste, managed to check the success of the Christian missionaries as well as to shift educated Bengalis' focus to their own religious heritage.[47]

At the same time, the majority faction (Nityānanda's school) of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas had reorganized themselves into the formally structured Gauḍīya Maṭha, modeled on Western monastic organizations, in response to the very present influence of Christianity and its missionaries in the region and to criticism of local religion by certain colonialists. This formal structure left little room for sectarian offshoots, and by this time the numbers of Advaita's followers had already dwindled considerably. Clearly those few remaining saw the end at hand. Given Advaita's prominence in the Caitanya literature, it was not likely that their founder's name and importance would be lost to history, regardless of whether the lineage itself survived. However, given the bad reputation certain segments of Vaiṣṇava society were earning for their *sahajiyā* leanings, it had become tremendously important to emphasize Advaita Ācārya's absolute respectability and his followers' steadfast adherence to their brahmanical purity.

By the mid nineteenth century intellectual power had shifted from the traditional village Sanskrit schools and the rote learning of religious and philosophical texts to institutions in urban Kolkata established largely to supply qualified local manpower to the colonial government and a curriculum mod-

eled on those of the great British universities. The centers of intellectual power were now largely in the hands of the British and of wealthy upper-class Bengalis: The Asiatic Society of Bengal (originally founded in 1784 for company officials in Bengal with the purpose of publishing translations of Indian classics), and Sanskrit College (Hindu College had merged with Sanskrit College in the early 1820s), which fed into the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge.[48] The College of Fort William was the first European-created institution in India to welcome Indians as faculty members and to encourage cultural exchange between Europeans and South Asians.[49] It was originally founded to train young British civil servants for their work in India. The college offered the usual English college curriculum, but also taught Indian history, law, and languages and was funded by payroll deduction from all civil servants in India.[50] Eventually the College of Fort William shrank, and its mission changed so that it served only the Hindu elite of the city[51] and came to be the most prestigious educational institution for the growing Bengali upper class. That elite group itself was divided between those who felt that Indian religions and the literature they produced were mere superstitious fancy and those who continued to see value in their own culture and its products.

Kolkata, however, was not the only seat of intellectual activity in Bengal. Scholars throughout Bengal were benefiting from the advent of printing and the development of Bengali fonts, and by 1825 at least four Bengali-language presses in or near Kolkata were in full and constant use.[52] Several scholarly journals were published in Shantipur in the mid to late nineteenth century, including the weekly paper *Bhārata Paridarśana;* the monthly *Baṅgabhūmi;* the monthly *Sarojinī;* the monthly *Mudgara*, and the weekly *Bhāratabhūmi*. In East Bengal, too, literary publications were appearing, including such local-interest journals as the *Śrīhaṭṭa Darpaṇa* and the *Śrīhaṭṭa Prakāśa*, published in Sylhet.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī (1844–1899)

Against the backdrop of (largely urban) westernization, Advaita Ācārya's lineage again steps into the limelight, as into all this intellectual fervor comes Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī, born under a full moon on February 8, 1844, in Dahakul village in Shantipur, in Nadīyā District. All the accounts of his birth and childhood are consistent with South Asian images of religious greatness. Bishnu Charan Das reports that Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's mother Svarṇamayī Devī had wondrous dreams while she was pregnant with him. She was in her backyard when the time for his birth approached. She fainted as her labor began, awakening to find the child in her arms and the placenta nearby on the ground.[53]

Another story tells that Svarṇamayī went to the temple to see the deity on Rāsa Pūrṇimā.[54] A radiant child emerged from the Śyāma Sundara[55] image and tugged on the loose end of her sari. The child would not identify himself, but he appeared to her a second time that night in a dream, saying, "Mother, I've come to you."[56]

Stories tell that as a child Vijaya Kṛṣṇa charmed all the women and girls in Dahakul, stole butter, and lay traps for the milkmaids going to market to sell their wares. In short, he behaved just as mischievously as did Kṛṣṇa in all the tales of his childhood.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa was a tenth-generation direct descendant of Advaita Ācārya through the fourth son, Balarāma, so his family was Vaiṣṇava, and we are told that from early childhood he always loved to dress as a renunciate and apply the Vaiṣṇava sectarian marks to his body. At the age of six, his hagiographers claim, he had a vision in which he was asked if he could be the "upholder of the glory of the house of Adwaita."[57] Reports of his childhood claim that he was kind to animals, had great moral courage, charmed everyone with his naughtiness,[58] and was given to trancelike states, which, Das reports, "showed that the child was a divine child."[59] His reported behavior mimicked that of the child Kṛṣṇa, and of Caitanya, signaling that Vijaya Kṛṣṇa was the same sort of being as they.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's mother Svarṇamayī Devī was Ānanda Kiśora's third wife, the first two having died shortly after their marriages. She bore him two sons, first Vraja Gopāla, and then Vijaya Kṛṣṇa. The first son's birth so delighted his father that Ānanda Kiśora immediately set out on foot to make pilgrimage to Puri, a journey in which he suffered many hardships. Acintyakumāra Senagupta reports a vision in which Jagannātha ("Lord of the Universe"), the image of Kṛṣṇa in the main temple at Puri, told Ānanda Kiśora to return home because Puruśottama, "the Supreme Being," was about to be born as his son. This revelation was incomprehensible to Ānanda Kiśora, so Jagannātha went on to explain that he still had some business left over from his last human birth[60] to take care of.[61] When Ānanda Kiśora returned to Dahakul, his second son had been born, the birth heralded by many miracles during the mother's pregnancy.

Ānanda Kiśora died while Vijaya Kṛṣṇa was still very young. The boy was fostered on his aunt Kṛṣṇamaṇī, but did not fare well under her care, nor did she live very long after his arrival. His biological mother Svarṇamayī is described as a saint, generous to the poor and downtrodden and very disturbed by the unequal treatment she saw different people around her receiving. She is said to have given away whatever she had with her whenever she encountered someone in need.[62] Her son's hagiographers describe the woman as a fit vessel to bear the child who was Caitanya returned, that is, as a woman possessed of many virtuous, and even divine, qualities herself.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa received his basic education in the village Sanskrit school and then at age fifteen he and a friend traveled to Kolkata to study Vedānta at Sanskrit College, then Bengal's foremost educational institution. We are told the boys remained unaffected by the "newfangled" ideas they encountered in the big city, but Vijaya Kṛṣṇa found his study of the monistic Vedānta philosophy quite transformative.[63] Up until this time he had known only dualistic devotionalism, with its focus on a personal god, and he found abstract monism very attractive. In fact his hagiographers, all good dualistic Vaiṣṇavas, seem to find this aspect of their subject's history troublesome, as they all devote a great deal of space to explaining to readers why Vijaya Kṛṣṇa had to have a Vedānta phase in his intellectual/spiritual development.[64]

That period of his life is well recorded and so cannot be ignored or denied, but if Vijaya Kṛṣṇa is to be held up as a model Vaiṣṇava, then he must of course be dualistic in his religious approach. His hagiographers are all admirers if not disciples. They use this portion of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's life to demonstrate the seductiveness of monism. None directly criticizes this approach, but all are clearly more interested in their subject's eventual return to his family's religious origins. Like his ancestor Advaita Ācārya, then, he had a period of monism early in life and then returned to dualistic devotion.

Meanwhile Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's roommate stole all his money, leaving him to roam the streets of Kolkata for days, eating only when someone took pity on him and fed him. Finally one day Vijaya Kṛṣṇa found the roommate, also roaming the streets, starving because he had gambled away all the money he had stolen. The two boys again decided to seek lodging together, renting a room from one Becharam Chattopadhyaya, who, we are told, was an alcoholic who could not provide surroundings conducive to any sort of spiritual practice for the boys.

At just this very low point Vijaya Kṛṣṇa encountered the Brāhmo Samāja.[65] He attended his first meeting on November 15, 1866, and was quite taken with the universalist tenor of the organization at that point. Devendranātha Tagore's words and demeanor captivated the young man when he first heard him speak at that Brāhmo meeting, and Vijaya Kṛṣṇa became very involved with the fledgling organization. He would continue as a devoted member and preacher of this new reform movement for many years. He found its focus on universalist monotheism and away from deity worship quite compelling. He joined several other Samājists in urging a compilation of the world's scriptures that would include the best each tradition had to offer.[66]

The universalism of Samāja activists like Keshab Chandra Sen and Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī contrasted sharply with the nationalism of another wing of the movement, whose views were perhaps first articulated by Nabagopal Mitra.[67]

This is another period of his life that his past and future fellow Vaiṣṇavas felt the need to justify. Many of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's hagiographers describe his involvement with the Brāhmo Samāja as a necessary step back to the devotional practices of his earlier days, and Das claims that his participation helped him to channel Vaiṣṇavism into Brāhmoism.[68]

Meanwhile, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī decided that he could best serve humanity through the medical profession and returned to Shantipur to obtain his mother's permission to study medicine. She found it difficult to consent to his request to pursue a very polluting line of work that would put him in contact with all sorts of people and their bodily fluids, but she eventually gave her permission.[69] And Vijaya Kṛṣṇa quickly rose to the top of his class at Medical College.

Before he left for medical school, he was married to Yogamāyā Devī, age six. The couple eventually produced four daughters, Santoṣiṇī, Premamālā, Premasakhī, and Śāntiśudhā, and one son, Yogajīvana. Their father was a good provider and, despite his activities elsewhere, the biographers insist, his family never suffered any privation.[70]

One day during this period of his life, when he was preaching on behalf of the Brāhmo Samāja, a boy asked him why he was still wearing his sacred thread, since the Brāhmo Samāja denounced caste discrimination. Vijaya Kṛṣṇa had never thought about this and tore his thread off on the spot. However, when his mother heard of his action she became completely distraught, threatening to hang herself, so he again began to wear the thread.[71] Now, though, he began to feel hypocritical about wearing the thread and eventually removed it permanently, despite the fury that action unleashed both at home and in Kolkata.

One time while he was attending a session of devotional singing at the house of one of the Shantipur *gosvāmīs*, some men, angry at Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's renouncing the sign of his brahmanism, tied some old shoes together and tried to throw them around Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's neck,[72] but the shoe garland landed on the neck of their host instead. Eventually the town elders urged him to leave Shantipur or start contributing to the local community. He must have been a persuasive speaker indeed for the Vaiṣṇava elders to have found him such a threat. In response he set up a local branch of the Brāhmo Samāja. That was the last straw for the local brahmanical orthodoxy, and at this point even his own brother rejected him.[73]

Now the young man left medical school, very shortly before his final examinations, and moved to Jessore, in modern Bangladesh, to become a Brāhmo Samāja missionary. Keshav Chandra Sen officially appointed him and Annada Charan Chattopadhyaya as executives of the Brāhmo Samāja to preach the message of social equality. And now, thanks to Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's initiative in the matter, the idea of refusing to wear the sacred thread spread among Brāhmo Samāja

members.[74] Even for those brahmans who decried caste discrimination the idea of dispensing with the sacred thread was not an easy one to accept.

The thread was the mark of caste and its inherent privilege. While members of all three of the twice-born castes wear the thread, each group wears a slightly different thread, and one's identity can be immediately discerned by the type of thread one wears. Brahmans comprise a small minority of the Indian population and historically have adhered tightly to the privilege their status conveys. This is not something to be discarded lightly. While Vijaya Kṛṣṇa seems to be attempting to demonstrate his lack of interest in external social conventions, rules, and regulations, clearly these things matter a great deal to those not as enlightened as he is.

As the Samāja grew and attracted more and more members, some internal friction arose. In time Vijaya Kṛṣṇa found the organizational politics distracting and retreated to Shantipur. In the peace of nature he decided that devotionalism was, after all, his true calling. He is reported to have had a beautiful, strong singing voice and, upon returning once more to Kolkata, he introduced the Samāja to the the Vaiṣṇava practice of parading through the streets singing devotional hymns.

By now he was feeling increasingly drawn to Caitanya and his brand of devotionalism and had returned to his own religious beginnings. Unlike most Vaiṣṇavas, however, he saw Caitanya not as an *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa but as the "Prophet of Nadīyā,"[75] a very human being who had a message for all humanity.

Das's biography of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī does not seem to follow a linear chronology, and he provides few dates, so it is difficult to determine the progression of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's life from Das's work alone. Nevertheless he recounts some interesting stories that help us further understand Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's disciples' (and Bishnu Charan Das was himself one) view of their leader. In one, for example, Das reports that one night, as Vijaya Kṛṣṇa sat in meditation, he heard a knock at his door. Upon opening the door he found Caitanya, accompanied by Advaita (Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's own ancestor, present to perform the necessary introductions), Nityānanda, and Śrīnivāsa,[76] who had come to initiate the young man.[77] That initiation launched him on the next phase of his spiritual career, a phase that began, as had those of Advaita and Caitanya before him (and as is common in Indian hagiography), with a significant pilgrimage.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa traveled first to Vārāṇasī, one of South Asia's oldest and most revered of sacred cities, located along the River Gaṅgā. Vārāṇasī teems with holy men and women, and with the devout who come to seek their blessings or to die on the river's holy shores. There Vijaya Kṛṣṇa met the famous Trailaṅga Svāmī.[78] Trailaṅga Svāmī's name is well known in North India. He was a naked renunciant of Vārāṇasī who seldom spoke or ate, and his followers believed he was over three hundred years old. They also reported that he possessed magical

powers and could swallow quantities of poison with no ill effects. During the course of their conversations, the *svāmī* pointed out to Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī the need for a personal guru. The *svāmī* explained that the young man would meet the appropriate guru when the time was ripe.

From then on, this need to find his true guru filled Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's mind. The notion of a personal guru, however, ran counter to Brāhmo philosophy, which placed great importance on the individual's responsibility for salvation.[79] Nevertheless, the figure of the guru is prominent in most South Asian religious traditions, and the relationship with the guru is probably more important in the lives of his (or her) disciples than is their specific sectarian affiliation. The guru technically belongs to his own guru's school, by virtue of his initiation, but may or may not feel any particular obligation to perpetuate the official teachings of that school. As discussed in chapter 3, the boundaries of guru lineages are far more fluid than theological treatises might lead us to believe.[80]

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa launched an all-out search for his master. He joined the *sahajīyas*, among whom Das includes the Kartābhajās,[81] Bauls,[82] Darveshis,[83] and Kishorī-bhajās.[84] Vijaya Kṛṣṇa admired their reverence for the guru, Das reports, but "decried their decayed morals."[85]

He traveled on to a second major pilgrimage site, Gayā,[86] a short distance from Vārāṇāsī. In this sacred place he met his long-awaited guru, Brahmānanda Paramahaṁsa-jī,[87] a man with a reputation for great yogic powers.[88] Under his newfound guru's influence Vijaya Kṛṣṇa became increasingly engrossed in his meditation practice, completely immersed in devotional fervor. Soon his guru sent him back to Vārāṇasī to take formal initiation as a renunciate from Hariharānanda Sarasvatī.[89] After his initiation Hariharānanda gave Vijaya Kṛṣṇa the initiated name of Acyutānanda Sarasvatī.[90] Svāmī Hariharānanda Sarasvatī (b. 1907) is a renunciate ascetic from a brahman family in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. After his renunciation he became a Hindu activist. In 1940 he organized the Dharma Sangh and, under its auspices, the Shiksa Mandal (Education Board). Extremely conservative regarding caste and related issues of the day, Hariharānanda opposed the liberalization laws that began appearing in the 1930s and eventually removed caste restrictions on temple entrance.

Acyutānanda Sarasvatī was banished from the Brāhmo Samāja for his reliance on gurus, for bowing before images and even certain people, for considering the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as the ideal for devotion, for his use of mantra for initiation, and for his uncritical acceptance of "certain [unspecified] doctrines."[91] All these practices and attitudes were anathema to the Samāja's monistic ideals.

By now he was a man lost in devotion to his god, firmly advocating the notion of divine grace as the "only thing capable of leading us to salvation."[92] His heart was no longer with the Samāja and its goals. Despite the formal banish-

ment, his departure from the Brāhmo Samāja was really by mutual consent, and he took many followers with him. Das, who seems bothered by the idea of his subject's so extensive involvement with the Samāja in the first place, justifies this involvement with the argument that the rational monism of the Samāja starkly contrasted with, and so cultivated, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's essentially devotional nature.[93] Acyutānanda Sarasvati himself reported that he "could not sacrifice his inner treasure to standardise and come into line with" the Brāhmo Samāja.[94] Nevertheless, to the end of his life, he never failed to acknowledge his debt to the Samāja. His refusal to condemn the Samāja, despite turning from it, makes his ultimate conservatism all the more remarkable.[95]

At this point (c. 1893) Acyutānanda Sarasvatī relocated to Dhaka, capital of modern Bangladesh, where he founded a peaceful suburban hermitage, attracting many followers and holy men of various sects. Although Dhaka would not become the capital of the British province of Eastern Bengal and Assam until 1905,[96] British rule in the area had been consolidated since the late eighteenth century.[97] Sanskrit *ṭolas* and Muslim *madrassas* had long been operating in the area, and the Baptist missionary O. Leonard opened the first English-style schools in 1817, most of which used Bengali as the medium of instruction.[98] Dacca College opened in 1841 and included a lower school, and that same year two normal schools were training teachers in Dhaka.[99] And the year Acyutānanda Sarasvatī moved to the city Jagannath College was founded there. B.C. Allen reported that tuition fees at Jagannath College were less expensive than at the Government English College (which had been founded in 1835 and became a B.S.-granting institution in 1841) and the education available there was perhaps less academically rigorous but still entirely adequate.[100] Dhaka was certainly no backwater, either in terms of culture in general or in terms of intellectual development.

From Gandaria Ashram just outside Dhaka, Acyutānanda Sarasvatī preached his seven great commandments:

1. Never indulge in self-praise
2. Never speak ill of others
3. Nonviolence is a great virtue
4. Have compassion for all
5. Place implicit reliance on the scriptures and the holy men
6. Avoid, like poison, what is incompatible with the tenets of the scriptures and the teachings of the saints
7. Egoism is the worst enemy.[101]

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa sought to establish a peaceful community of disciples for whom spiritual life was more important than material success and who were willing to

set aside personal interests in favor of the authority of scripture. He was building, in other words, a very conservative community that looked to its remote history for authority and guidance. His response to the encroaching West and its brand of modernity was to simply turn his back on it.

Now that Acyutānanda Sarasvati had returned to his Vaiṣṇava family roots and begun worshipping Kṛṣṇa, he began to accept the notion of divine presence on earth among mortals, which he had previously rejected. And among these embodiments, he found Caitanya the most captivating. Bishnu Charan Das tells us that Caitanya appeared to Acyutānanda on the banks of the Yamunā River and begged him to be reborn "for the sake of the hardened sinners of the modern world."[102] However, unlike many of Caitanya's followers, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa rejected the idea of *parakīya prema* and for a long time did not even allow women into his presence.[103] Later, he spent a year in Vṛndāvana, immersed in the emotional mood of Kṛṣṇa's favorite consort Rādhā, after which he changed his stance on women.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī spent a considerable amount of time in and around Shantipur. Tradition tells that he enjoyed meditating at the idyllic spot known as Bāblā, just outside of town. This had also been a favorite location for Advaita Ācārya. One mildly controversial story,[104] accepted locally, tells of Advaita's frustration at being the recipient of Caitanya's tremendous respect simply because of his advanced age. He would have much preferred for Caitanya to treat him just as he did his other disciples. In the CBh account of this episode Advaita seems particularly frustrated that Caitanya always treats him deferentially, as befits their great age difference. So, to attract Caitanya's attention, Advaita began to preach nondualistic monism. Caitanya of course quickly got wind of this and was furious to hear that Advaita had apparently renounced devotionalism. Caitanya crossed the river from Navadvīpa and raced to Bāblā to find Advaita. He found a large stick and began to beat Advaita with it, shouting all the while. Sītā and the others were shocked to see this behavior. Caitanya only stopped when Advaita had fallen to the ground. Advaita, however, was pleased, because finally he realized that his guru cared enough to come and correct his errors. Today a small temple commemorates this event.

Villagers would often hear beautiful devotional music at this spot but could never find the people who were singing. Vijaya Kṛṣṇa said the music was echoing from Caitanya's time.[105] Bāblā was once on the riverbank, but monsoon after monsoon has caused the Gaṅgā to shift her course, and now the river flows a short walk's distance from Bāblā. The mango groves remain a peaceful and favorite picnic destination of the region.

One day as he meditated here at Bāblā, local legend tells, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa noticed a dog's unusually persistent interest in one particular spot. Curious, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa began digging at the same place, and found a pair of wooden sandals and a set

of brass pots of the type used for worship. When he saw "Kamalākṣa" carved on the sandals, he immediately recognized these artifacts as Advaita Ācārya's own belongings. To sanctify the place and commemorate the important discovery, he had a small temple built, elevated so that worshippers must climb a flight of stairs to enter. The artifacts have been enshrined beneath the temple images,[106] and duplicates are on display.

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa declared the dog to have previously been a renunciate. As if he knew he was the subject of conversation, the dog approached him. Vijaya Kṛṣṇa suggested to the dog that he now give up his body, since his life's work was done. The next morning people found the animal's corpse on the riverbank.[107]

After his travels Vijaya Kṛṣṇa returned to the Dhaka hermitage in 1895 for the great celebrations in honor of Advaita Ācārya's birthday and initiated many new disciples on that occasion. Shortly thereafter he again left on pilgrimage.[108] Now that his main focus was his devotion to Kṛṣṇa, he ceased to be the eloquent preacher of his earlier days. He traveled to Kolkata and then on to Puri, where we are told that he was so touched by the sight of the tremendous poverty and misery he saw there that he decided on the spot to do what he could to alleviate these people's suffering.[109]

He became the local *kalpataru*, the wish-fulfilling tree, although he possessed few material resources himself. People flocked to him for assistance, and somehow his "divine treasury" provided. This activity continued for a full year, and, meanwhile, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's health began to deteriorate seriously. His disciples thought he would return to his family in Kolkata once his debts were cleared, and took it upon themselves to settle these debts.[110] During this period he instructed his disciple Gopālacandra Gosvāmī to ask Vīreśvara Pramāṇika to compose a work on the life of Advaita Ācārya, and he produced the *Advaita Vilāsa* (see chapter 3).

Finally, in 1899, some ill-wishers mixed poison with his food and presented it to him as sanctified food that had been offered to the deity in the temple. Although (his hagiographers write) Vijaya Kṛṣṇa realized their intention, he ate the food anyway. (This account further brings to mind some of the stories of the death of the Buddha, in which he was fed food he realized had been poisoned but ate it anyway.) He did not die immediately, but lingered for an entire month, suffering from the effects of the poison. But for a full week he told no one what was happening to him. And finally, Das tells us, "the Master left the body and became one with Jagannath," on April 6, 1899.[111]

Bishnu Charan Das makes no mention of claims that Vijaya Kṛṣṇa was Advaita himself returned to his home of Shantipur. Kiraṇacānda Daraveśa does make such a claim, in his *Śrīadvaita Abhiśāpa*. I found this little pamphlet for sale in 2001 on the pavement outside the temple at Bāblā where Advaita's purported relics are enshrined.

Daraveśa tells the story of his guru Śrīdhara's roamings in Nadīyā. Śrīdhara stopped for the night at the home of a Vaiṣṇava family in Shantipur and in the morning went to the temple of Śyāma Sundara, the temple for which Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's family had responsibility, to pay his respects. He noticed an old-looking manuscript tucked on the right side of the image and asked his host about it. The host told him that the manuscript had been written by his ancestor Paramānanda Dāsa,[112] who had been a servant in Advaita's and Sītā's household. Paramānanda had written down much of what he had observed in the house, but the text had never been made public because some of the accounts were somewhat shocking.

Śrīdhara's interest was particularly piqued by one section entitled "Lord Advaita's Curse," as he had heard no such story of Caitanya being cursed by the older man.

The tale begins shortly after Caitanya has taken his renunciate's vows and is about to set out on pilgrimage to Vṛndāvana. Nityānanda summons him at this point to Advaita's house in Shantipur, and a ten-day devotional love fest ensues. On the tenth day, Paramānanda reports, he ran in to the kitchen in response to Sītā's urgent call. "You've ruined everything!" she cried. "We're completely out of cooking spices! Why didn't you get more at the market?" And he races off to remedy the situation, but becomes distracted when he sees Caitanya sitting under a tree in the front yard. Advaita stood in front of Caitanya, gesticulating angrily with his hands. Nityānanda stood nearby, laughing quietly. Paramānanda immediately forgets his urgent errand and hides behind a nearby bush to eavesdrop, and later wrote a full account of what he heard.

Śrīdhara made a copy of that section of the manuscript and kept it, sharing its contents with many others. No other copies were made, however, and in 1897, after he had suffered a bout of smallpox, all his possessions were burned, on his doctors' orders. Daraveśa subsequently tried to return to the house where his guru had first seen the manuscript, but was unable to find anyone there who remembered his guru's visit or the manuscript in question.

Sometime thereafter, in 1917, Daraveśa himself wrote a narrative poem he called "Śrīadvaita Abhiśāpa," based on his recollection of that manuscript, so that this amazing story would be available to others. Daraveśa tells his readers that he is a disciple of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī and sings his guru's praises at the beginning and the end of his composition.

The story centers around Caitanya's insistence that as a renunciate he must leave the familiar territory of Nadīyā. Recognizing his relatives' and associates' reluctance to see him go, he decides to settle in Purī, a major Vaiṣṇava center in the adjacent state of Orissa. Advaita, however, cannot stand the thought of losing Caitanya at all and insists that the younger man remain close by, reminding

him that Advaita himself had settled in Shantipur deliberately in anticipation of Caitanya's advent in the region. Advaita becomes ever more furious as he continues to berate Caitanya for his selfishness and disregard for brahman life.

At the peak of his rage he pronounces a curse on Caitanya that he will have to be born again to satisfy Advaita's desire for his companionship. Advaita proclaims that Caitanya will have a ten-generation grace period, because of the ten days he has just spent at Advaita's house, and then Caitanya will again take birth, in Advaita's lineage.

This of course is a prediction of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's own advent. Caudhurī and Mukhopādhyāya report a long-standing tradition that Caitanya would reappear in Advaita's tenth generation,[113] though their source was probably not the same as Śrīdhara's.

Caitanya accepts this curse with equanimity, adding that he can never be without Advaita and Nityānanda, and so the three of them will be born together, in a single body. He continues to describe the appearance of this triple incarnation as a large man with flowing dreadlocks. The description matches the photographs we have of Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī, who was certainly a very large man, large enough (at a time when obesity was very rare) that his size might easily have suggested to his followers that he was actually three men born into a single body.[114]

Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's biographers all write about him using the standard conventions of hagiography. His birth is presaged by auspicious dreams and omens, his entire life centers around his insatiable spiritual searching, and his death is described very ambiguously as a merging with his god. A great deal of importance is attached to his brahmanical heritage in the lineage of Advaita Ācārya and to his adherence to the strictures that birth in that caste traditionally entails. And, as with his illustrious ancestor, his religious inclinations took him from devotionalism to a more intellectual faith and back again. The Daraveśa account builds on the standard conceit of Caitanya as the joint incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together in a single body with its remarkable claim that Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī is the joint incarnation of three people, the three founders of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Caitanya, Advaita, and Nityānanda. If we deconstruct these three further, then Vijaya Kṛṣṇa can be seen to encompass Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa (Caitanya), Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva (Advaita), and Balarāma (Nityānanda), representative of even earlier indigenous religion. This far-reaching claim not only highlights Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī's importance in the eyes of his followers but, like earlier hagiographical works, manages to subsume previously existing regional religious trends and unite them in him. That step constitutes a move to place Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī at the pinnacle of all religious expression of his day.

A nearly simultaneous clear attempt to boost interest in Advaita Ācārya came through Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi, the great literary scholar credited

with the authorship of numerous historical texts and Vaiṣṇava works as well as with the discovery of the *Bālya-Līlā-Sūtra, Sītā Caritra* and *Advaita Prakāśa.*

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi (1866–1953)

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī was born in the village of Mainā, in Jafar Fort District of Karimgañja of what is now Bangladesh.[115] He was roughly contemporary with Vijaya Kṛṣṇa but lived a very different sort of life. His family had been civil servants for some time and were staunch defenders of the British in India. Kar tells us that the family came to the aid of the English seven times between the years 1828 and 1871, during the fight against the company's local enemy Rādhārāma. Further, the Caudhurīs sided with the British during the uprising of 1857. This is not the background one would expect for a staunch supporter of Bengali nationalism!

Acyutacaraṇa spent his childhood in the village but was sent to the regional (English-medium) high school to complete his studies. Shortly after he completed his high school education his family urged him to marry. His first wife Priyavālā was the daughter of Govinda Caraṇa Rāya of the nearby village of Lātu. She bore a daughter, Cinmayī, and a son, Hemāṅga, and died soon after the birth of her son, at the age of twenty-four. Caudhurī records that Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī, whom Caudhurī had met some time before in Navadvīpa, learned of Priyavālā's illness and somehow made his way to Mainā to visit the family.

Caudhurī married a second time, to Ānandamayī, daughter of Ratnakṛṣṇa Caudhurī of Indānagara, and this bride also died early. She gave birth to a son, Kusumāṅga, and a daughter, Suṣamā, who did survive to marry and produce her own children. Vijaya Kṛṣṇa appeared again the morning this second wife died and washed her head and feet in preparation for the funeral rites. At that time he also initiated the eight-month-old Kusumāṅga with the Hari *nāma* mantra, and the baby died soon thereafter.

Finally he married Muktakeśī, the daughter of Bhavānīcaraṇa Dāsa, who outlived him by at least four decades. Her son Gaurāṅga died at birth. Her daughter Nīlimā died young, but outlived her father, and a daughter, Vīṇāpāni, lived until 1972.

Acyutacaraṇa traveled to Kolkata in 1908 with a press copy of his *Śrīhaṭṭera Itivṛtta.* His second wife and her son died during this absence. A few short months later Acyutacaraṇa's favorite brother Aniruddha also died. When the second volume of the history was published, the first child of his third wife died. Every time Acyutacaraṇa published a book someone close to him died.

He published prolifically between 1891 and 1930, but we have no record of anything appearing any later, though he lived until 1953.

He taught for some time at the English school in Sylhet. In mid-1905 he was awarded a certificate commending him for his work there and regretting his resignation from that post.

After so many sorrows early in life, Caudhurī decided to remain in his home village and pledged his life not only to his own spiritual development but also to the public good. But, before returning home, he taught for a while in Sunāmgañja and also worked in the tax collection office, where he first came to understand the poverty that surrounded him.

His family had always been Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, of the lineage of Advaita Ācārya, and Acyutacaraṇa followed this tradition as well, becoming a leader in the movement. Caudhurī traced his lineage from Advaita Ācārya himself, as follows: Advaita Ācārya, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, Raghunātha Gosvāmī, Yādavendra Gosvāmī, Jayagopāla Gosvāmī, Gauracandra Gosvāmī, Ānandamohana Gosvāmī Tarkabhūṣaṇa, Rāmagopāla Gosvāmī, and finally Caudhurī's own guru, Rādhikānātha Gosvāmī. Caudhurī is a descendant of Advaita's second son, while Vijaya Kṛṣṇa's ancestry descends from Balarāma, the fourth.

Caudhurī was not interested in merely maintaining the Vaiṣṇava status quo but wanted others to appreciate the significance of the tradition both spiritually and culturally. To this end he established the Śrī Gaurāṅga Śākhā Samāja in Mainā.[116]

His guru Rādhikānātha Gosvāmī bestowed on Caudhurī the title of *Tattvanidhi* ("Storehouse of Knowledge") in 1896 for his lifelong dedication to their cause, and he used this title for the rest of his life. He received many other similarly illustrious honors during his career.[117] In time Caudhurī became a self-appointed guardian of Bengali literature and is particularly remembered as such in Bangladesh and Assam. The Government of Assam gave him a lifetime salary in recognition of his work. Born far from the new center of Bengali literature and culture of Kolkata, he worked hard to ensure the place of literature and scholarship produced in his part of the Bengali world. His admirers included such renowned scholars as Dinesh Chandra Sen, Śiśirkumāra Ghoṣa, and Rabindranath Tagore. In the introduction to his *Baṅgabhāṣā o Sāhitya* D.C. Sen thanked Caudhurī for teaching him so much about the lives of the early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava leaders, though the two scholars had never met.

Most of his literary work was dedicated to furthering the Vaiṣṇava cause, its theology and aesthetic theory. He was hailed as among the foremost of his contemporaries from the Sylhet region and wrote prolifically. He published twenty-nine books (two for children) and wrote eighteen others that were never published, in addition to numerous articles in at least thirteen different journals. He served as editor on three of these journals, *Śrī bhakti prabhā*, *Śrīhaṭṭa Darpaṇa*, and *Kamalā* (which he coedited with Ramaṇīmohana Dāsa). Caudhurī

also composed poetry. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi was no insignificant literateur. Bimanbihari Majumdar thoroughly reviewed Caudhurī's work in his own *Śrīcaitanyera Caritera Upādāna.*

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī's magnum opus was his *Śrīhaṭṭera Itivṛtta*, published in two volumes in 1910 and 1916. The great nineteenth century writer Baṅkimcandra Chatterjee (1838–1896) had, not long before, urged all Bengali scholars to collaborate on a history of Bengal, and clearly Acyutacaraṇa was motivated by a strong sense of patriotism to produce this enormous work. *Śrīhaṭṭera Itivṛtta* received a favorable reception and became the model for Bengali regional history writing. These two facts become even more significant when one realizes that scholars in what is now West Bengal have tended at best to give short shrift to, and at worst to ignore, their countrymen and women to the east.

Acyutacaraṇa was the founding president of the Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat, the Sylhet Literary Society. He donated his collection of manuscripts and rare books to that organization's library.[118] He also assisted many literary scholars in publishing their works.

The three Vaiṣṇava hagiographical works Caudhurī brought to public attention fit quite neatly into his usual scholarly purview.

Bālya Līlā Sūtra (BLS)

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi edited and translated the *Bālya Līlā Sūtra* (BLS) into Bengali verse, publishing it as *Caritāmālikā* No. 2 with the Śrīdhara Library in Karimgañja in 1915. He had first announced his discovery of the text twenty-four years earlier in the *Śrīviṣṇupriyā Patrikā*. The BLS, purportedly composed by Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa c. 1487, would be the oldest of the biographical works concerning Advaita Ācārya and indeed of the entire Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. The text consists of eight chapters with a total of 337 couplets, composed in fourteen different meters. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi explains the provenance of the text in his introduction:

> Mr. Stapleton, Inspector of Schools for Dhaka District; the scholar Nāgendranātha Basu, and Sodārapratimā Raya; Dineśa Candra Sen, and others brought this book to my attention. Śrīnātha Gosvāmī Prabhu of Advaita's lineage, who lives in Dhaka Uthali, was once travelling in Lāuḍa, and found this book in the house of a brahman there and very carefully collected it. He brought it home and showed it to his brother, the late Madhusūdana Gosvāmī Prabhu, and then to the late Madanagopāla Gosvāmī Prabhu, the well-known teacher of scriptures who lived in Shantipur, and after that, to the great

scholar Muralimohana Gosvāmī Prabhu, who lived in Pābnā. Each of them treasured this book as a priceless jewel.[119]

Caudhurī tells us that Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa eventually left Shantipur for Vṛndāvana and became the first member of the Bengali Vaiṣṇava community to reside there, information that he may have found in the *Prema Vilāsa*. Kṛṣṇadāsa's only other literary product is a translation of Viṣṇupurī's Sanskrit *Viṣṇu Bhakti Ratnāvalī* into Bengali *payāra*[120] meter, and that text is mentioned in the *Prema Vilāsa*.

Advaita Prakāśa (AP)[121]

Īśāna Nāgara writes that he completed his *Advaita Prakāśa* (AP) c. 1568. The text appears to have remained undiscovered until Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī introduced it in the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* issue No. 4 of 1303 Bengali Era (c. 1897 C.E.). It was apparently first published and edited c. 1898 by Keśavalāla Raya. Satiścandra Mitra edited and published a "new edition" c. 1927; a second edition edited by Mṛṇālakānti Ghoṣa bears no publication date, but the third edition, also edited by Ghoṣa, was published c. 1933. The texts of the published editions are identical.

The only extant manuscript of AP of which I am aware is MS. No. 4683 in the collection of Dhaka University. The colophon of this manuscript indicates that it was copied in 1892 C.E. from a manuscript dated 1780. The paper and style of handwriting support this claim. The manuscript at Dhaka University is clearly not an original text, as throughout its pages can be seen examples of the scribe's having lost his place in the exemplar and later corrected his errors. I have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the date given for the manuscript from which this extant manuscript was copied. The text of that manuscript does not differ significantly from the published editions of the text, though there are a few verses in the manuscript that do not appear in the published text and vice versa. Additionally, spellings in the manuscript do not always match those in the published text, and one occasionally finds lexical variants in the form of synonyms of similar metrical value. In terms of content, the manuscript does not differ at all from the published text.

The author of AP, Īśāna Nāgara, characterizes himself as a domestic servant in Advaita Ācārya's household and describes events in that household with the perspective of such an insider: preparations for feeding guests, Sītā's recipes, her manner of cooking. While his accounts of these activities are quite convincing, it must be borne in mind that Advaita Ācārya was a proper traditional brahman householder, so his domestic life would be quite predictable and anyone could have described life in that household, whether or not such a writer had actually

witnessed the proceedings himself. We do find mention of an Īśāna, in *Advaita Maṅgala*, as one of Advaita's disciples.

Advaita Prakāśa treats the life of Advaita Ācārya, and is one of the last pieces of hagiography on Advaita Ācārya. The author presents his reader with a great deal of polemic about Vaiṣṇavism in general but also more specifically about Advaita and his importance to the larger group. Many of the stories told are so transparently miraculous in nature as to provide excellent examples of the uses of hagiography as a religious literary genre.

Sītā Caritra (SC)

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi edited Lokanātha Dāsa's *Sītā Caritra* (SC) c. 1926 and published it in the journal *Bhaktiprabhā* in Kolkata. *Sītā Caritra*[122] is devoted entirely to Sītā Devī and gives some indication of just how problematic her leadership was for the movement. Lokanātha Dāsa paints a picture of a Sītā who was intelligent and powerful and yet in every respect the proper Bengali brahman housewife.

Because she was a woman, it would not have been proper for her to instruct any man to whom she was not related. *Sītā Caritra* tells a fascinating story of two men who so much wanted to study with her that her powers and their devotion transformed them into women. Once that transformation had been effected, she could teach them with no taint of scandal.

Some have suggested that this problem and its solution may have marked the beginning of the *sakhī bhāva*[123] movement, whose male adherents carry the Vaiṣṇava notion that for religious purposes the only male entity is Kṛṣṇa and everyone else is female in relation to him, to the extreme of dressing and behaving as women, sometimes even surgically altering their anatomy to do so.

The composition of this work seems to have been motivated by the need to demonstrate that while Sītā did play a very public role in in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, she nevertheless always remained within the bounds of propriety.

Lokanātha reveals no information about himself in his composition. One Lokanātha, mentioned in the *Bhakti Ratnākara*, was the son of Padmanābha Cakravartī of Talakhadhi, in Jessore District, and old friend of Advaita's and Sītā's. This Lokanātha had been a classmate of Caitanya. The *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* includes the name of a Lokanātha Paṇḍita on the roster of Advaita's students[124] and also mentions a Lokanātha Gosvāmī in Vṛndāvana who is clearly not the author of SC. AP mentions[125] a Lokanātha Cakravartī who took mantra initiation from Advaita Ācārya. The *Prema Vilāsa*, however, lists a Lokanātha among Caitanya's disciples. Most probably these texts are referring to two different Lokanāthas.

The text of SC is composed in Bengali, largely in the *payāra* meter. Twenty-three Sanskrit couplets are interspersed throughout the text, and most of these verses are followed by Bengali translation and elaboration in *tripādī*[126] meter. The text is undated, but mentions both the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* and the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, so must have been written no earlier than the first two or three decades of the seventeenth century. In addition to the printed text, at least two manuscripts of SC remain extant.[127] The published edition of SC divides the text into nine complete chapters, although its colophon says it contains thirteen, and I found eleven signature lines.

The text is not strictly biographical in that it does not relate the life history of Sītā (Advaita's primary wife) but rather uses anecdotal material to describe her devotion to Caitanya and her activities with her students. Of particular interest are the sections concerning Sītā's interactions with her students Nandarāma and Yajñeśvara, alias Nandinī and Jaṅgalī, two male devotees who dressed and behaved like women. Lokanātha suggests quite strongly that Sītā Devī was the founder of the Vaiṣṇava subsect of *sakhī bhāvas*. The *padāvalī* literature, however, contradicts this postulation, because there we find *sakhī bhāvika* poetry that predates Sītā and the period of her leadership. Nonetheless, Lokanātha's highlighting Sītā's close connection with the group suggests that the *sakhī bhāva* sect may have been founded partly as a concession to current morality, which forbade a woman to look at a man to whom she was unrelated and forbade men from taking initiation from women. The text states that Sītā believed Nandinī and Jaṅgalī were women and that her instructing them was therefore in conformity with social norms.

These three texts provide previously unknown material about Advaita Ācārya and his family and dramatically increased the size of the Advaita Ācārya hagiographical corpus. Until their discoveries we had only what is found about Advaita in the Caitanya corpus and in the *Advaita Maṅgala*. And yet the newly discovered texts raise far more questions than they answer.

In the next three chapters I will discuss these three texts, which Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi discovered and presented to the public.

5

Another "Black Forgery" or Mere Play?

IN THIS CHAPTER I WILL DISCUSS the purportedly earliest of the three texts of the Advaita corpus that Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi discovered in the late nineteenth century. *Bālya Līlā Sūtra (BLS), The Summary of His Childhood Activities*, is a short (eight chapters) work composed in Sanskrit treating the childhood and family background of Kamalākṣa Bhaṭṭācārya, the man who would come to be known as Advaita Ācārya.[1]

This text presents three very different sets of issues or, perhaps, two sets of issues and one noteworthy situation. First, the text is little known and rarely cited, so its provenance is uncertain. Some Vaiṣṇava scholars consider it a forgery, a rather strong word to describe the relatively recent creation of an original text to meet a sectarian and political need. I will offer some speculation about the genesis of the text and what may have impelled its creation. Second, the author discusses Bengali brahmanical social structure at some length, and yet the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition prides itself on its availability to all devotees, regardless of socioeconomic status. This discussion is at least curious, and I will return to it in detail following the summary of the BLS.

And finally, one could argue that without Advaita, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement would never have succeeded. Advaita is universally credited with having summoned Kṛṣṇa to the Nadīyā region of Bengal.[2] Yet, despite his indispensable role, membership in Advaita's school shrank over time. By the mid nineteenth century his descendants realistically feared that his name would be forgotten entirely. Fortunately for them, three very interesting and probably previously unknown compositions treating Advaita Ācārya surfaced at the end of the nineteenth century to save him from otherwise inevitable obscurity. BLS was one of these three texts.

The BLS first came to scholarly attention in an article in the Kolkata journal *Śrī Viṣṇu Patrikā* in 1891, and in 1915 the Śrīdhara Library of Karimgañja, in what

is now the northeasternmost point of Bangladesh, published the text in its entirety in Bengali script, with a Bengali verse translation. We learn from the text that its author is Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa,[3] formerly King Divyasiṁha of the land of Advaita's birth, in what is now Sylhet District of Bangladesh.

I begin the discussion of the BLS with its putative author, and will then move on to what we know of its provenance. The middle section of this chapter is a summary of the text itself, and I follow that with comments on the sociological and theological significance of the work before formulating my conclusions.

Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa is not widely known. With typical Vaiṣṇava humility, he describes himself as "extremely old and ignorant"[4] at the time he composed BLS (finished, he writes, in 1487). At that point Advaita would have been in his early fifties, and this Kṛṣṇadāsa, who had a son of approximately Advaita's own age, must himself have been at least in his early seventies. Now known as Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa, Caudhurī reports, Divyasiṁha had been an independent king who ruled in the Sylhet kingdom of Lāuḍa in the early fourteenth century.[5] The king's family were brahmans of the Kātyāyana lineage and *Śāktas* (goddess worshippers), according to the text itself.[6] Apparently gleaning from other (unnamed) texts, Acyutacaraṇa provides some information about Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa and his conversion to Vaiṣṇavism in his introduction to the BLS:

> When Divyasiṁha was old he bestowed his kingdom on his son and set off with the intention of living in Kāśī, and on the way stopped to visit his (former) minister's son. But he was not allowed to go to Kāśī. At one roar[7] from Advaita his long-cherished religious beliefs were transformed, and he took up Vaiṣṇavism and joined Advaita's disciples.[8]

We find some potentially corroborating evidence for this king's historical existence in another hagiography treating Advaita Ācārya, Haricaraṇa Dāsa's *Advaita Maṅgala*, discussed in chapter 2. Haricaraṇa Dāsa tells the story of the young Kamalākānta's refusal to bow to an image of the goddess in her temple in *Advaita Maṅgala* II.1. We learn that Lāuḍa is a Śākta kingdom, and see its king, whom Haricaraṇa Dāsa names, gradually come to accept the child's Vaiṣṇavism and abandon his ancestral faith.

Nityānanda Dāsa also mentions the BLS in many places in his *Prema Vilāsa* (PV),[9] and that text was quite well known in the early days of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The PV's history in fact epitomizes the state of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature: the most complete version of a text is considered the most authentic, and there is no sectarian interest in rooting out any sort of Ur-text. The PV has grown discernably throughout its history, first appearing as a text of sixteen *vilāsas*, or chapters, and increasing incrementally to arrive at its current volume

of twenty-five. The twenty-fourth *vilāsa* is the one in which Advaita Ācārya receives a great deal of attention. The provenance of the last few *vilāsas* is uncertain and somewhat suspect, but Advaita's hagiographers often quote from the work. Nityānanda Dāsa writes,

> At Advaita Ācārya's command that very king Divyasiṁha . . .
> (who now) lives in Shantipur, came to Advaita's feet,
> Gave up his Śakti-mantra and took initiation in the mantra of Gopāla the cowherd god.
> Advaita bestowed on him the name Kṛṣṇadāsa, Servant of Kṛṣṇa.
> Kṛṣṇadāsa revealed a little of Advaita's life story.
> He studied the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with Advaita Ācarya, and (finally) went to Vṛndāvana.

Returning to Caudhurī's own information on the BLS, we read that Kṛṣṇadāsa built a flower hut near his guru's house in Shantipur, where he used to sing devotional hymns by the hour. After a while Kṛṣṇadāsa got tired of all the people who would come and left for Vṛndāvana. At that time Vṛndāvana was still largely forest, and the sites of Kṛṣṇa's activities remained undiscovered, and no Bengalis were spending time there. Among the Bengalis who immigrated to Vṛndāvana, this *yogī*-king was the very first, and this, Caudhurī notes, should be a source of pride for all Bengalis.

Caudhurī elaborates on the last line above, stating that Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa became the first member of the Bengali Vaiṣṇava school to reside in Vṛndāvana.[10] Nityānanda Dāsa attributes one other work, a translation of Viṣṇupurī's Sanskrit *Viṣṇu Bhakti Ratnāvalī*[11] into Bengali *payāra* meter, to this same Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa. This author remains otherwise unknown, for his name appears nowhere outside the Advaita Ācārya corpus, a situation that only complicates the task of determining the provenance of the text.

Another complicating factor is the author's use of specific dates, rare in premodern South Asian literature. While Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa himself does not provide dates, the editor does. Caudhurī begins giving us dates in the very first paragraph of his introduction to the BLS, where he mentions, correctly, that Īśāna Nāgara cites the BLS in his *Advaita Prakāśa* (AP), which its colophon indicates was completed c. 1568 C.E. Apparently he accepts this date of composition.

Caudhurī is placing the Advaita corpus in temporally prior relation to the entire widely known Caitanya corpus, but he does this entirely with reference to the rest of the Advaita corpus—a body of texts whose dates of composition are far less certain than those of the works treating Caitanya. His failure to provide any inde-

pendent literary confirmation for the BLS, and the absence of any mention of that text in any other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature, must lead us to one of two conclusions. Either the BLS did not yet exist at the time any of the Caitanya works were composed or it was not considered worth mentioning. Regarding the latter, one cannot imagine that any work treating the life of the individual who served as the instrumental cause of the incarnation of the age (Caitanya) could be so ignored. As for the former, most of the Gauḍīya writers cited heavily from each others' writings, barring some sectarian reason not to do so. We would therefore expect to find quotations from or references to the BLS in other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava material. We do not. This situation forces Caudhurī to account for the existence of the BLS very meticulously. He must report every stage in its history with as much detail as possible to counter the probable and justifiable skepticism of his readers.

The BLS was brought to his attention, Caudhurī tells us, by a three-man committee consisting of Dhaka school superintendent Stapleton, Nāgendranātha Basu, and noted literary scholar Dineścandra Sena. Śrīnātha Gosvāmī, a descendant of Advaita then living in Dhaka, found the book in the custody of an unnamed brahman when he was traveling through the region of Lāuḍa, his own ancestral home. He took it to his brother Madhusūdana Gosvāmī,[12] and then to the Sylheti scholar Madanagopāla Gosvāmī, and then to Muralīmohana Gosvāmī of Pābnā. Each one declared the BLS a "priceless jewel." Muralīmohana Gosvāmī[13] added a very flowery verse in praise of Śrīnātha Gosvāmī at the end of the original manuscript:

> In the land of Śrīhaṭṭa full of devotion to Hari, that lotus-sun clothed in the moon Advaita got this charming book by Śrīnātha, the bestower of devotion to Hari.[14]

We are led to believe that all of these people saw the same single manuscript (and the implication is that this manuscript was the sole exemplar of the BLS) and that that manuscript was subsequently copied by someone who did not know Sanskrit (and so made many mistakes in his transmission). We have no information on what became of it. Caudhurī reported keeping it in Bangladesh, and in fact one manuscript of the BLS seems to have been placed in the collection of the Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat, but that rich institution and all its holdings were razed in December 1992 in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India. Nor do we know where any of the recensions of the BLS are, as none appears in any of the standard manuscript catalogues or in the in-house catalogues of any of the libraries in India or Bangladesh one might expect to hold such an important piece. The text was published only once.

No manuscripts of the BLS remain extant, and the book is long out of print. The only copy of which I am aware is in the collection of the British Library, and even that carefully protected piece is missing a page, fortunately from the introduction and not from the text itself. Caudhurī hints that he had placed a copy of the manuscript with which he worked in some repository in Sylhet. If so, that repository would most likely have been the Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat. My field work plans included a 1993 visit to Sylhet to see that institution as well as the sites of Advaita's early life. In December of 1992, however, working in Kolkata in the midst of the communal violence that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid throughout the Bengali world, my heart sank. A few months later, I read Taslima Nasreen's novel *Lajja*, in which she mentions, almost in passing, the razing of the Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat. Finally in April of 1994 I was able to visit Sylhet. My hosts, whose families had themselves survived the carnage because of the intervention of some of their students who had been among the perpetrators, quietly drove me past the pile of rubble and ash—all that remained of a once impressive collection of Bengali published and manuscript literature. Now there is no way to confirm my speculation about the disposition of this text, though this consequence seems small next to all the other damage wrought at the time.

Caudhurī reports that the text he saw first, probably the copy, contained a great many errors. Wanting to restore the text to its author's original intentions, Caudhurī asked Professor Padmanātha Vidyāvinoda Sarasvatī to correct the Sanskrit errors in the manuscript. The professor commented that these seeming infelicities were not so much errors as they were deliberate Vedicisms, examples of very archaic Sanskrit grammar and usage. Specifically, Padmanātha believed that Divyasiṁha had deliberately imitated the language of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP) and cites a few passages from the BhP that appear almost verbatim in the BLS.

I have discussed the linguistic peculiarities of the BLS at some length elsewhere[15] and so here will simply describe them in broad terms. The work is composed in Sanskrit, but that Sanskrit is very problematic. Not only does its grammar fail to comply with the Pāṇinian rules for Classical Sanskrit,[16] but we also find lexical and metrical peculiarities in the work. Many of these seeming aberrations are quite typical of what Richard Salomon calls "vernacular Sanskrit."[17] Still the language of the text draws attention to itself by its very eccentricity.

Caudhurī indicates that the BLS contains many examples of *ārṣa* usage, that is, Vedicisms. He concurs with Padmanātha Vidyāvinoda Sarasvatī that this linguistic peculiarity is in imitation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a relatively late (probably ninth to tenth century) *purāṇa* whose author's choice of language and subject matter seem intended to suggest a much more ancient text. Why might the author of BLS imitate the BhP in any respect?

Two reasons come to mind immediately, one cultural and one linguistic. First, the BhP is widely accepted among the various Vaiṣṇava groups as an authoritative text, and has often even been called a "fifth Veda." This issue of authority plays an enormous role in South Asian religious history, as it does elsewhere in the world. Who holds authority and what texts that authority allows them to deem legitimate expressions of sectarian theology become crucial points in determining what comprises canon and praxis for a given community. Any new movement to arise must then demonstrate its own legitimacy by connecting its leaders and/or the new teaching to some extant tradition whose own authority is unquestionable. That relationship then serves as a conduit to allow the authority of the established tradition to pass to the newer one, granting it sanction within the larger tradition. The relationship may be set up overtly, through philosophy and theology, or more subtly, as is the case with the BLS, by an author's choice of language and even individual lexical items.

A perhaps more widely known example of this phenomenon of a new group's claim to historical continuity with an older reflects the tremendous impact the eighth-century monist Śaṅkara held over subsequent philosophers and theologians throughout South Asia. Śaṅkara set the theological standard that would affect religious expression and organization in South Asia ever after.

Four historical schools of Vaiṣṇavism predate the Gauḍīya school. These are Rāmānuja's Śrī Vaiṣṇavism (*viśiṣṭādvaita,* or qualified nondualism), Madhva's Brahma Vaiṣṇavism (*dvaita,* or dualism), Vallabhācārya's Rudra Vaiṣṇavism (*śuddhādvaita,* or pure nondualism), and Nimbārka's Sanaka Vaiṣṇavism (*dvaitādvaita,* or dualistic nondualism). All, reacting to Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda,* produced commentaries on the *Brahma Sūtras* in which their theologians expounded their own philosophies. These four schools became the accepted legitimate vehicles of Vaiṣṇavism across South Asia.

From time to time another group would emerge, usually, but not always, as an offshoot of one of the established four. If that new group's members wanted to establish themselves as equally authentic, they, too had to produce a commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* demonstrating their own philosophical connection to the relevant history. This great body of commentatorial literature encapsulated the theology of each school. The Gauḍīyas too eventually produced such a commentary, but not until the eighteenth century when their authority to worship in the Govinda Temple in Jaipur was challenged during a pan-Vaiṣṇava conference there in Rajasthan and they needed to demonstrate their legitimate right, both to the specific temple worship and to call themselves Vaiṣṇavas at all. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa did manage to establish their theological legitimacy.[118]

Closer to the hearts of many Vaiṣṇavas than theological discussion, however, are the many charming tales of Kṛṣṇa in his childhood and adolescent exploits.

Devotees continue to hold tremendous affection for Kṛṣṇa and his various *avatāras*, through the stories recounted in the BhP. And so imitating any aspect of that work would automatically confer some of its authority and strength to the imitator.

The linguistic corollary to the cultural phenomenon, and my second point, is that the language of the BhP is already archaic,[19] thus suggesting the text dates back to hoary antiquity. It does not, and yet the linguistic archaisms help to lend the text a sense of timelessness that also adheres to any other composition to borrow those usages. And if the author of such a text is attempting to pass his work off as the oldest of its genre, as is Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa, the archaisms aid him in so doing. The author of the BLS is making a dramatic yet indirect claim that his own work is both very old and unquestionably authentic. Medieval hagiographers in Europe did the same thing by citing from much earlier Latin sources in their work.

The language of the BLS, fascinating as it is, unfortunately is of no help in the scholarly attempt to date the text. While archaic language *may* indicate an early date of composition, a good scholar of any time since that language was current could reproduce it. We have at least one confirmed instance of just this sort of forgery in the infamous episode of *Govindadāsera Kaḍacā*.[20] In the late nineteenth century a manuscript surfaced that appeared to consist of notes made by one of Caitanya's servants, a blacksmith named Govindadāsa, as he accompanied Caitanya on his trip south in 1510–1512. The text revealed previously unknown details about that period in Caitanya's life, and produced quite a stir in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava circles. It had originally surfaced in a trove of manuscripts given to Jayagopāla Gosvāmī, a direct descendant of Advaita Ācārya then (c. 1875) living in Shantipur. The text was subsequently published, in 1895, and the controversy about its origins raged for the next thirty years.

In 1924 scholars all over Bengal, many of whom had long had their doubts about the genuineness of Govindadāsa's *Kaḍacā*, met to discuss the issue. The discussions, and the ongoing conversations with D.C. Sen, who accepted it at face value, were at times quite heated. Many noted the differences between accounts of some of the events of Caitanya's life in the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* and the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* and accounts of the same events in the *kaḍacā*, citing these seeming discrepancies as proof of inauthenticity. Responding to their criticism, B. B. Majumdar, in his detailed examination of all the Gauḍīya hagiographical material then extant, based his own skepticism not only on these discrepancies but, more convincingly, on geographical errors and anachronisms in the text.[21]

Bepin Vihari Das Gupta had published his own scathing refutation of the text as a "black forgery" in 1937, some two years prior to the appearance of Majum-

dar's dissertation. He succeeded in establishing the *kaḍacā* as a late nineteenth century composition. Like Majumdar, he based his assessment first of all on the discrepancies between accounts of several events in Caitanya's life as related in the standard hagiographies and in the *kaḍacā*.

Much more convincing is Das Gupta's use of the internal evidence of the text itself. He cites numerous examples of word usage not yet current in the Bengali of the sixteenth century and, even more damning, of the use of place names that only came into use in the late nineteenth century. Das Gupta's conclusions stand unchallenged.[22]

D.C. Sen, who apparently believed in the authenticity of this text to the end, attempts to rebut the criticism. He makes an important point here, one to which I will return in chapter 8. Sen rightly points out that narrative differences between two accounts do not necessarily nullify either of them,[23] but he has nothing to say about the less disputable issues of geography or linguistic currency, which provide far more compelling evidence for a late date of composition.

The BLS may very well constitute a similar attempt, from another component of Advaita Ācārya's lineage, to preserve the fading memory and reputation of their illustrious ancestor. To return to the use of language choice to suggest the age and authenticity of a text, van Buitenen suggests, convincingly, that the supposed archaisms in the language of the BhP represent a part of the process of "Sanskritization." M. N. Srinivasan defines Sanskritization as

> the process by which a "low" caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of, a high and, in particular, a "twice-born" (*dwija*) caste. . . . It normally presupposes either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self-consciousness resulting from its contact with a source of the "Great Tradition" of Hinduism such as a pilgrim centre of a monastery or a proselytizing sect.[24]

That is to say, the author of the BhP perhaps hoped to link the Vaiṣṇava tradition with the ancient past by describing the adventures of Kṛṣṇa in archaic language. He thus essentially was "restating a tradition in relation to a sacral past,"[25] thereby constructing a conduit, as described above, for that sacred past and the authority of that past to travel to the author's present and adhere to the new devotionalism.

The author of the BLS has taken Sanskritization one step further, using Advaita Ācārya himself as the vessel for religious authority. Advaita Ācārya played two major roles in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. First, he summoned Kṛṣṇa

to earth in Nadīyā, but, second, as an established scholar and pillar of society by the time of Caitanya's birth, he lent the fledgling community his own reputation and respectability. His brahmanical erudition and his advanced age provided legitimacy to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas as they were emerging as a distinct school. Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa's description of Advaita's heritage and early life, in language that harkens back to that of the Vedas, serves on the one hand to underscore the message of respectability and legitimacy and, on the other, to arrogate the authority the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* carries to his own composition.

The language of the text is sufficiently inconsistent to lead one to wonder just how comfortable its author was with Sanskrit of any type. A skilled Sanskritist, whether writing in the fifteenth or the nineteenth century, would have been able to reproduce Vedic language and could have simply copied a few archaisms in appropriate places from a text like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. A dilettante experimenting with the language as the appropriate medium for communicating his message might have been forced to borrow now and then from earlier stages of his own (contemporary, non-Sanskrit) language, lacking the necessary Sanskrit training from which to draw. Whoever the actual author of the BLS may have been, we see no evidence in the text that he was a classically trained Sanskritist. In any case, its language alone neither confirms nor denies the 1487 purported date of composition, though it does provide other interesting information about the text. Language gives the reader clues about the atmosphere an author hoped to create, about that author's attitude toward his subject, and about how the author may have wanted his work to be received.

Also noteworthy is the author's use of fourteen different meters in this short text. Most writers will stick to one metrical structure or at most two or three, with a change in meter often indicating a change in tone, speaker, or narrative weight. The only work in the Caitanya corpus to display such an abundance of metrical structures is the *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛtam Mahākāvyam* of Karṇapūra (KCCM), the third of Caitanya's hagiographies, composed nine years after the death of Caitanya. The KCCM is a lengthy Sanskrit work of twenty chapters, and S. K. De reports counting at least thirty-three different meters in it.[26] We find only fourteen different meters in BLS, but given the much shorter length of that work, that number is still remarkable. Its author manages to use several[27] rarely seen meters that Karṇapūra does not exhibit. Clearly Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa labored over this issue, searching out unusual metrical forms that would both demonstrate his own erudition and mark his composition with distinction. This profuse metrical display is unusual enough to make us wonder what the text's author hoped it might accomplish. Imitation is the highest form of flattery, and at least in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition writers view imitation as admiration, certainly not as

plagiarism or even laziness. So, if there is a template for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiography (and I believe there is), that template must include stylistic as well as contextual components (the use of plot, miracle, and character from other, established, compositions). Whichever work is prior—the KCCM or the BLS—clearly the metrical breadth constitutes a portion of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiographical template. Surely if the author of a composition on the life of such a figure as Caitanya uses a tremendous variety of meters to help highlight his subject's importance, then the author of a work on the life of Advaita, arguably even more significant to the school for his having brought Caitanya in, can use a similar model in his own composition. The KCCM provided the linguistic and stylistic model, and the BhP the grammatical model.

Caudhurī published the Sanskrit text of the BLS with a Bengali translation. Such complex poetry couched in an already difficult language poses many problems to a translator. If he concentrates on content alone, his readers will never appreciate the poetry of the piece, yet, if he tries to recreate the poetic style of the original, his translation will probably suffer. This is the standard problem translators have always faced. Wrestling with this issue, Caudhurī reports that he had originally planned on publishing BLS with a prose translation, but finally, on the advice of many Vaiṣṇava scholars, he published a verse translation. Since the translator is so inept, he tells us, we will find a great many errors in meter, etc., and finally, perhaps in response to the reader skepticism he anticipates, Caudhurī writes, "Let those who will, call it unauthentic."

Summary of the *Bālya-Līlā-Sūtra*

The first chapter of the BLS opens with the standard homage to gurus and gods and proceeds to provide the lineage of Kubera, Advaita Ācārya's father, through the male line. The second chapter at first glance appears to be a digression, as it deals with the marriage of Kubera's only sister Kulojjvalā.[28] The discussion here, however, serves to emphasize Advaita's high social status within the top rank of Vārendra brahmans.[29] The daughter is crucial to the preservation of kulinism,[30] since the status of her marriage partner can elevate her entire natal family to his rank. Kulojjvalā's marriage in a very real sense determines the future of her family. I will return to the complexities of caste, which bear significantly on BLS, and in fact on the author's main purpose in compositing the text, following this plot summary.

Although Kubera's ancestors were from Sylhet, his father, Narasiṁha, had lived in the town of Dinajpur (in what is now Rajshahi Division in

northwestern Bangladesh) as minister to the local king. The family were originally *śrotriya* brahmans.[31] Narasiṁha moved away from Sylhet because he felt that the family had degenerated away from proper *kulīna* morality and ethics over the generations. He decided to settle on the bank of the holy river Gaṅgā at Shantipur for one socially strategic reason: living here, he could give his daughter to Madhyagrāma's foremost *kulīna* family, that of Madhu Maitreya, and thereby restore his family to their former status. But Madhu's sons (from his first marriage) opposed this marriage because Narasiṁha was a low-level *śrotriya,* and a family crisis ensued. Narasiṁha takes his daughter, a cow, and a *śalagrāma*[32] by boat when he goes to arrange the marriage. But Madhu, a *kulīna,* fears losing caste if he marries the girl. Narasiṁha, insulted, assures him that *siddha śrotriyas* are just as good as *kulīnas*. Then, adding strength to his argument, he threatens to sink the boat, which would make Madhu guilty of the triple crime of killing a brahman, a cow, and a woman. And so Madhu relents.

By virtue of this marriage Kulojjvalā's natal family is elevated to *kulīna* status. Her father builds a tall monument to commemorate their good fortune. Madhu's sons, still opposed to this union, also do some commemorative building and erect a fence in the middle of the family compound to ostracize their father and his new family. Eventually Madhu's sons are declared in the wrong, and so *kulīna* society comes to call them *kāpa,* the term applied to brahmans who have lost caste.

In the last few verses of the chapter we learn of Kubera's own marriage, to Lābhā,[33] daughter of Nīlamegha, a *sacchrotriya* brahman. Their married life begins in chapter 3, where we learn in the first few verses of the births and apparently nearly immediate deaths of six sons and a daughter. In despair, the couple leaves Navagrāma and travels to Shantipur, where Kubera had grown up, to live out their lives in prayer on the banks of the holy river Gaṅgā. One day the goddess Gaṅgā appears to Kubera as he performs his morning prayers, proclaiming that Viṣṇu himself would be born to the couple. And sure enough, before long Lābhā discovers that she is once again pregnant.

Meanwhile King Divyasiṁha summons the couple back to Lāuḍa. As Kubera and the king are renewing their acquaintance, a brahman soothsayer appears out of nowhere and announces that Lābhā's child will be an extraordinary and long-lived man. And then the soothsayer disappears without a trace.

Shortly thereafter Lābhā dreams of Viṣṇu and Śiva together, singing Hare Kṛṣṇa. Yama, god of death, appears before them. And at last, on the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Māgha,[34] in 1356 Śaka (c. 1434), Advaita is born in Lāuḍa. His birth is accompanied by fragrant breezes and a rain of flowers, and the visit of gods and demigods; all come to take refuge at

his feet.[35] They all promise to follow Viṣṇu/Śiva to earth with their entire retinues to serve Kṛṣṇa. Kubera presents gifts to the priests, feeds the poor, puts on a huge feast for the townspeople, etc., and the child is named Kamalākṣa, the lotus-eyed boy.

Chapter 4 begins the tale of Kamalākṣa's childhood exploits. He refuses to eat or drink anything that has not first been offered to Viṣṇu. The child surprises his mother one day when she finds him worshipping Kṛṣṇa in the family's shrine room, with all the proper rituals. On another occasion, just to please his mother, he persuades all the river pilgrimage sites to install themselves on the nearby mountain. This gesture, on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Caitra,[36] marks the origin of the festival of Paṇā Tīrtha, during which devotees believe they are bathing in the waters of all the rivers and the ocean. This festival is still conducted today, with the Ramakrishna Mission organizing busloads of pilgrims traveling from Dhaka.[37]

Chapter 5 deals with Kamalākṣa's education and an event in a Śākta temple. Kamalākṣa has gone to the temple with Divyasiṁha's son. The prince becomes quite upset when his friend refuses to bow before the image of the goddess. Kamalākṣa lets out a roar so fierce that the other boy faints, much to the consternation of everyone present. When the prince's father, in another Śākta temple nearby, hears the news, he comes running. Everyone fears the prince dead. Kamalākṣa is nowhere to be found. Kubera runs off in search of his son, and eventually finds him, hiding in one of the enormous anthills[38] so common in South Asia. Kamalākṣa explains to his father what has happened, and together they return to the temple and sprinkle the unconscious prince with Gaṅgā water that had been further sanctified by its use in bathing the image of Viṣṇu. As his son regains consciousness, Divyasiṁha falls at Kamalākṣa's feet, proclaiming the child to be an embodiment of Śiva. Kamalākṣa reveals his true divine form (Śiva) to those present. Later, at home, he conceals his divinity and resumes his usual appearance as a normal child.

Kubera summons all the priests and brahmans in the neighborhood for the boy's sacred thread initiation. Thereafter he instructs his son himself, and the boy masters the Vedas and their six adjuncts[39] in record time.

On another occasion, we read in chapter 6, on the new moon in the autumn month of Kārtīka,[40] the day of the goddess festival, Divyasiṁha goes to the biggest temple to the goddess Caṇḍī in town to celebrate. Kamalākṣa and his friends arrive after the music has begun, and he sits down without bowing to the goddess. This apparent breach of manners greatly disturbs the king, who reprimands him severely. The child replies that the goddess is certainly worthy of worship but is in fact nothing more remarkable than a divine ploy to distract us from the lord Kṛṣṇa-Hari. Kamalākṣa will not bow before her. Besides, he continues, a goddess

who pervades the entire universe can hardly be contained in that piece of stone there in the corner!

Kubera is impressed with his son's eloquence, but not persuaded, and insists that the boy pay his obeisances to the goddess, arguing that she is no different from Viṣṇu. Again the boy refuses. Once more his father insists that Śakti is but one aspect of Viṣṇu. The boy now, still speaking very politely, begins to discuss the darker side of the goddess, saying that no deity who wears a garland of heads is worthy of devotion.

After a bit more debating, the boy capitulates. But the goddess averts her head as the boy bows and, addressing him as Śiva, says she has come to Lāuḍa only to see him and would now leave. The child tells her that she will eventually take on human form to act as his partner in life and, further, that Kṛṣṇa too will come, in a fair form, in Navadvīpa. Kamalākṣa announces his own plan to move to Shantipur and bring Hari to earth to save the world. At that, the stone image shatters in a glorious blaze of light, and Kamalākṣa disappears.

Kubera returns home to report all this to Lābhā. The couple are beside themselves with grief at the apparent loss of yet another child. That night Viṣṇu appears to Kubera in a dream and explains all that has happened, reminding Kubera that his son is really Śiva and that he has gone to Shantipur to force Hari to come to earth. He also proclaims that Lābhā and Kubera have attained liberation and will not return to the world in any subsequent birth. From then on the couple live like yogis, abandoning all sensual activity. Kamalākṣa, in Shantipur, realizes this, and sends word to his parents, who quickly travel there to see him. A tearful reunion ensues, after which Kubera sends the boy to study *dharmaśāstra*[41] with Śānta in nearby Pūrṇavāti.

The eighth and final chapter concludes Kamalākṣa's childhood. We see him with his guru Śānta, with whom he studies the six philosophical systems and other scriptural materials. One day Śānta notices an especially beautiful lotus in the middle of the lake and asks his students to pick it for him. Kamalākṣa, without thinking twice, walks out into the snake-infested lake, picks the lotus, and presents it to his guru. This act of walking on water convinces Śānta that the boy is divine, and indeed Kamalākṣa confirms that he was *īśvaraṁśa* (8.8), a "partial (manifestation of the) lord."

Sometime later, completing his studies, Kamalākṣa seeks permission to return to his parents. Śānta says he will miss the child terribly but grants the permission, bestowing on him the name Vedapañcānana.

Vedapañcānana returns to Kubera and Lābhā and vows to take care of them for the rest of their lives. They ask him to be sure to take their ashes to Gayā[42] after their deaths to ensure their final liberation, and they live about one more

year. At the ordained moment a flower-bedecked chariot descends to carry them to Viṣṇu's heavenly abode. And, as promised, Kamalākṣa performed his parents' last rites, and the book ends.

Sociological Importance of the *Bālya-Līlā-Sūtra*

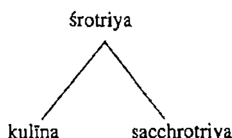
Bengali brahman hierarchy is somewhat complicated, and varies among the four major brahman groups[43] found in the region. These divisions were originally based on geography. Advaita Ācārya's family, from East Bengal, belonged to the Vārendra brahman group. A few scholars have studied the Rādhā group, but few have had much to say about the Vārendras. According to the Rādhā *kulakārikas*, or genealogies, King Ādiśūra brought five brahmans from Kanauj, quite far to the northwest, to Bengal at a time when the local brahmans had become so corrupt as to have lost caste and were therefore no longer eligible to perform the sorts of rituals a king would require.[44] Unfortunately we have no certain date for when this occurred,[45] nor can we accept these genealogies as historically accurate.[46] Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri also point out that the *kulakārikas* are often at variance with each other.[47] Nevertheless, the documents claim that Ādiśūra married these imported brahmans to local women so that they would not return to Kanauj[48] and gave them villages to settle in. As these brahmans died, their sons from previous marriages back in Kanauj came to Bengal to perform their funeral rites and settled there. Their step-siblings felt humiliated and did not want to live with the newcomers in Rāḍha, so the king sent them north to Vārendra.[49] A generation later Ādiśūra's son Bhūśūra sent the sons of those original five brahmans to the area now known as Rāḍha. And some time after that, in the late twelfth century, King Vallāla Sena formally divided the Rāḍha and Vārendra brahmans into two groups.[50]

The highest Brahman classification in either group was that of *kulīna*. Early on, however, all Vārendra brahmans belonged to the group known as *śrotriya*,[51] the designation given to the imported brahmans (the original Bengali brahmans are called the *Saptasatis*). The *śrotriyas* soon split into the *kulacala* (or *kulīna*) and *sacchrotriya* groups. In time the *kulīnas* emerged at the higher level of the social organization. The *kulīnas* split into the *mukhya* (major) and *gauna* (minor) groups, and eventually the *gauna kulīnas* merged with the *śrotriyas*.

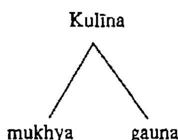
Śrotriyas are made up of four classes, in descending order, the *susiddhas*, the *siddhas*, the *sāddhyas*, and the *kaṣṭas* (also called *aris*).

Thereafter the Sena kings frequently reorganized Rāḍhiya brahman society, but no such change was instituted among the Vārendras.[52]

Phase I, Vārendra Brahman Social Structure[i]



Phase II



Phase III: Śrotriya subdivisions:

Susiddha

Siddha

Sāddhya

Kaṣṭa/ari

FIGURE 5.1. *Vārendra Brahman Social Structure*

Vārendras had no restrictions on marriage, so that *kulīna* men could marry women of any brahman group. Kulinism was originally an honor bestowed on the basis of specific accomplishments, initiation, and scriptural study and was not hereditary. Eventually, when King Lakṣmaṇa Sena (ruled 1179–1206) observed that there were no longer any *kulīnas* properly qualified for that position, he decreed that thereafter kulinism would be determined by birth alone. Further, kulinism depended on the marriage of a daughter to a *kulīna* male.[54] The number of *kulīna* males had by this time decreased so much that brahman families vied to secure their own social positions, and did all they could to marry their daughters to *kulīna* men.

The second chapter of the BLS includes an interesting account of Advaita's family's position within this complicated social structure. Apparently the author

wanted to place Advaita Ācārya and family as far up in the brahman hierarchy as he could, and in that section seems to be seeking to put Advaita at the very top, while also acknowledging where his family began. It is worth noting that the episode in which Narasiṁha essentially blackmails the *kulīna* Madhu Maitreya to marry his daughter, by taking the girl, a cow, and a *śālagrāma* out into the river on a raft and threatening to sink the raft if Maitreya refused the marriage, can be found in the Rāḍha genealogies.[55] This far-sighted act of blackmail results in the entire family's elevation to *kulīna* status. This social promotion will in turn make it possible two generations later for Advaita/Kamalākṣa to marry Sītā, also a *kulīna.*

Because *kulīna* men were considered such valuable grooms, they might marry several different women. These brides would remain in their own fathers' households and see their husbands only a few times a year at most. Marriage to a *kulīna* would grant a girl's family tremendous status, but often resulted in the bride's own happiness being sacrificed for her family's benefit. Over time *kulīna* marriage practices degenerated until often very young girls were married to very old *kulīna* men who died even before their wives reached puberty. The girls were then consigned to the austere and miserable life of widows and were not permitted to remarry. Ahmad Wakil, in his description of the social climate of Bengal at the time of Caitanya, mentions *kulīna* marriage as one of the causes for what he perceives to have been a paralysis in Hindu society that left the culture open to the "radical reforms"[56] introduced by Caitanya and his associates.

Raychaudhuri and Rauchaudhuri cite the *Advaita Prakāśa* account of this marriage as further evidence for social conditions prevailing in their own time.[57] Apparently they accept the date of composition given in that text as authentic. Ronald Inden, however, seems to indicate that the idea that a man could improve his family's social and caste status by marrying his daughter upward was a later development. Inden claims, based on extensive study of genealogical and other relevant materials, that these social changes came into effect in what he terms the "middle period" of Bengali history, that is, the period roughly between 1500 and 1850.[58]

The BLS purports to have been composed in 1487. Regardless of when the text was written, the events surrounding the marriage of Narasiṁha, Advaita's great-grandfather, would have occurred in the late fourteenth century. Advaita was born around 1434 when his father (born in the mid fourteenth century) was in his mid seventies;[59] and Narasiṁha's marriage described here occurred when his sons by a previous marriage were already adult. Thus a reasonable estimate places this marriage sometime in the late fourteenth century, well

before the marriage practice described had developed, according to Inden's reckoning.[60] R. C. Majumdāra supports Inden and concludes that the *kulīna* system became crystallized as described in the late fifteenth century. R. C. Majumdāra suggests that this institutionalization can be attributed to attempts to trace local social origins to the "golden age of Hinduism."[61]

Raychaudhuri also reports this particular story as one of many explaining the origin of the *kāpa* group of brahmans in Bengal. He reports, with no citation as to its source,[62] a rather different account of the situation. In this version Madhu Maitra, a *kulīna*, had refused to dine with Narasiṁha Nāḍiyāla, who belonged to the lower level of *śrotriyas*. Narasiṁha wanted to avenge this insult, and so took his daughter and a cow in a boat to Madhu's bathing *ghāṭa*. He insisted that Madhu marry his daughter, threatening to sink the boat if he refused. Realizing that he would then accrue the sin of the triple murder of a cow, a woman, and a brahman, Madhu reluctantly consented.

Madhu's sons from his first marriage, however, feared the loss of their *kulīna* status as a result of this marriage and so ostracized their father. But some time later Madhu's sister's husband Dhayī Vāgcī, who had come for an annual family religious observance, proclaimed that Madhu's kulīnism was still intact. Madhu's sons continued to disagree, so Vāgcī outcaste them for their rudeness, and the sons then became *kāpā*.[63]

Raychaudhuri cites AP (no doubt having meant BLS) that Narasiṁha was a minister of Rājā Gaṇeśa and then dates these events to the early fifteenth century, since Ganeśa ruled from 1409–1414 C.E.[64] This King Ganeśa is credited with having restored Hindu suzerainty to the region at a time of Muslim incursion and power struggles.[65] A Bengali Hindu (though that word was not yet in currency) writing at a later time of foreign incursion would have some strong political motivation for connecting his subject with Rāja Ganeśa. Many of Caitanya's followers expected him to lead them in an uprising to throw off Muslim dominance; perhaps some of Advaita's followers had similar ambitions for their leader, or merely wanted to show that Advaita was the proper herald, by his association with Rāja Ganeśa, for the man who would lead the revolution.

According to another version of the story, Madhu was eventually redeemed when Kaṁṣa Nārāyaṇa, a high-ranking *śrotriya*, married his daughters to Madhu's sons from this second alliance, after which the *kulīna* community accepted Madhu and his descendants by the second wife as *kulīnas*.[66]

Kālīkṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭācārya found three different genealogies for Advaita Ācārya. In addition to the one cited in the BLS, he cites another D.C. Sen had listed in his

History of Bengali Language and Literature and a third that Jayagopāla Gosvāmī, of Shantipur, had produced. He cites D.C. Sen's comments on this variation:

> Advaita's descendants became gosvamis and holding an exalted position among the Vaiṣṇavas, wanted to match the genealogies of the Kulin Brahmins who could name their thirty-three ancestors or more. This may account for the long tables which some of them produce now and also for the disagreement among those obtained from different sources.[67]

In other words, Sen suggests, the genealogies may have been invented to support a claim of very high birth indeed. The complications regarding the dating of social institutions like kulinism in its various forms with reference to the date of composition of the text itself suggest that the author of the BLS wanted to emphasize Advaita's descent from the very highest levels of Bengali society much more than he sought to stress the actual date he wrote the piece. His audience would have been well aware of Advaita's brahman status but might not know that the man came from the very highest ranks of Bengali brahmans. Most of the authors of the Advaita corpus attach great importance to this very status and to the ritual purity and orthodoxy that are assumed to accompany such high rank.

Theological Importance of the *Bālya-Līlā-Sūtra*

We do not find much theological discussion in the BLS, though the text does contain a number of different statements about Advaita's theological identity. More often we find the author's assertion about his subject's divinity couched in his narrative, as in the episodes with the goddess in chapters 5 and 6. The BLS is the first hagiographical piece we have examined to elaborate on Advaita's dual embodiment. The CC considers him both Mahaviṣṇu and Sadāśiva, but merely tells us this, with no detail or explanation. In the BLS we see several restatements of this postulation—it is nothing new—from Lābhā's private dreams to the boy's very public encounters in the temple of the goddess. Early on the author tells us that Viṣṇu will take birth as Kubera's future son. Viṣṇu had apparently visited earth earlier in Kali Yuga, noticed Kubera's integrity and devotion, and swore that he, with Gopeśvara and Ādiśiva,[68] would enter Lābhā's womb to reward the couple for their piety. Lābhā herself, shortly after her pregnancy is confirmed, dreams of Viṣṇu and Śiva dancing in her heart as one spirit. And the god Yama appears, though we are not told why.

At the child's birth various gods appear to salute him, addressing the infant first as Śiva-Viṣṇu and then as Viṣṇu-Śiva, perhaps in an effort not to privilege either deity. Some time later, we read in the next chapter, while Lābhā is dozing off as she nurses her son she dreams of two radiant little boys, one like a silver mountain, the other dark and beautiful (standard conceptions of Śiva and Viṣṇu respectively), playing in the yard, and then the two children merge and enter the sleeping body of her son. A more clear statement of the dual embodiment of Advaita Ācārya would be difficult to imagine.

The two stories of the encounters with the goddess place equal weight on both gods. Kamalākṣa's discussion of *devī* as Śakti brings Viṣṇu to mind, while calling her Kālī suggests Śiva. The goddess is generic, a point brought home by the interchangeability of her names.

In either case, that goddess clearly recognizes Advaita as her husband, and so cannot accept his bowing to her, as that would constitute a transgression of gender propriety between spouses. This situation is so untenable that it physically shatters the stone sculpture in which she resides, and she flees. However, we are left with the problem of then explaining Kamalākṣa's rude behaviour toward her. Such public disrespect of one's wife would certainly not be acceptable, and so this image seems rather forced.

We know that both Śaivism and Śāktism were prevalent in Bengal in the fifteenth century, and we know that Vaiṣṇavism was far less popular prior to Caitanya's arrival. These two episodes with the goddess, then, would seem to constitute attempts on the author's part to use standard Śiva-Śakti imagery to subsume those religions under the burgeoning Vaiṣṇava rubric. That is, the author may be showing us that Vaiṣṇavism contains all other varieties of religious expression, and so one no longer needs to bow to an image of the goddess because in worshipping Kṛṣṇa one worships all deities. Further, as mentioned in chapter 3, the presence of these stories indicates the keen awareness the Gauḍīyas held of their Śākta rivals and of the perceived need to correct their misguided behavior so that they would be ready to worship Kṛṣṇa when Caitanya was born.

Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa seems to want us to know that this theological identity he is presenting is not just a metaphor but is to be understood quite literally. He highlights the majestic aspect of Advaita's nature, the awesome and somewhat distant relationship with the divine favored prior to the rise of medieval devotionalism. And yet rarely do we see Advaita displaying a divine form. In fact in the BLS he presents Śānta alone with such a vision. He also manifests his true form in the *devī* temple but disappears at the crucial moment so no one actually sees him as Śiva. In later hagiographies Advaita will grant certain people visions of his divine form as a reward for their having attained some level of realization, but that is not generally the case here in the BLS.

The text as a whole contains an interesting mix of variously attestable historical information, such as issues of caste purity and the rule of Rājā Gaṇeśa, blended with the genealogy of Advaita Ācārya. Families, and particularly wealthy, literate families, certainly retain records of births and deaths. Caste groups also maintain genealogies. Such information concerning religious leaders may well have been kept along with other temple records. The question is, however, given the fragility of organic materials in Bengal, whether, and how, such records would have remained extant for Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa's perusal in the mid fifteenth century, let alone for the confirming examination of much later scholars.

Another interesting feature of the BLS is the sparse detail its author provides. While chapter 1 with its lengthy genealogy is quite complete, and we read a thorough account of the shattering of the image in the temple in chapter 6, most of the BLS is quite sketchy. Yama's appearance in Lābhā's dream is briefly mentioned, with no explanation, and even the interesting story of Paṇā Tīrtha contains too little data to follow carefully.

The text in fact seems to be an outline of sorts, suggesting it may have been a test model for a lengthier, more detailed work. Perhaps, in composing it, the author was simply trying out the idea of producing a Sanskrit version of Advaita Ācārya's life story. Or perhaps he had in mind to compose a Bengali version expanding on these Sanskrit verses, as Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja did with his *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Those Sanskrit verses read alone tell the complete story of the CC, in the pithy style typical of *sūtra* literature. Kṛṣṇadāsa's lengthy Bengali text expands and expounds on those Sanskrit verses. And indeed the bilingual textual model is not at all unusual in Bengali literature of this time. Perhaps "Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa" planned to add more material between his Sanskrit lines, in imitation of the author of the CC.

Murāri Gupta, author of the *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛtam (KCC)*, the earliest work on the life of Caitanya, also wrote in Sanskrit. That ancient language was the appropriate medium for significant religious literature, even in Bengal with its own burgeoning vernacular literature, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The KCC is often referred to as a notebook (*kaḍacā*), suggesting a short composition, although it is actually quite a lengthy work of four books of between sixteen and twenty-six chapters each. Nonetheless, the KCC is significantly shorter than either the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* or Kṛṣṇadāsa's *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Perhaps the author of the BLS saw the KCC as the model to follow in documenting the life of a major sectarian leader.

Thus, all in all, the appearance of a short initial work in Sanskrit using a wide variety of meters, followed by a lengthier work in sixteenth century vernacular Bengali, conforms to the model set by the Caitanya corpus. If we take the purported date of composition as accurate, however, then it would appear that

the Advaita materials, composed prior to the Caitanya corpus, set the template Caitanya's hagiographies later followed, rather than the generally assumed reverse. And this is exactly what Advaita's hagiographers are asserting: that their leader is prior to and perhaps even more important to attaining Kṛṣṇa than was Caitanya.

In fact the provenance of the BLS is by no means clear. It is very odd indeed that a text treating so pivotal a figure as Advaita Ācārya, composed in 1487, remains unnoticed elsewhere in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature, and all the more so given the propensity of the major Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava writers to cite frequently from the works of earlier writers. One must wonder whether the BLS was indeed extant at all in the fifteenth century. Īśāna Nāgara, author of the AP,[69] cites the BLS early in his own work, as does the author of the *Prema Vilāsa*. But, outside the Advaita corpus, no author mentions the BLS.

One well-known scholar who claimed in print[70] to have seen the manuscript Acyutacaraṇa describes is Dineścandra Sen, an outstanding literary scholar and one of the first members of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat. Professor Sen, however, had already been deceived by another purportedly early composition that turned out to be a forgery, namely, Govindadāsa's *Kaḍacā*, discussed earlier in this chapter. In responding to criticism of his judgment that the *Kaḍacā* was indeed what it appeared to be, D.C. Sen points out that his family is Śākta and so he has no personal stake in the authenticity of any Vaiṣṇava text. Nonetheless it is curious that he seems to have been twice deceived by hagiographical material generated by Advaita Ācārya's descendants, particularly after the public ridicule to which other scholars subjected him after the publication of the *Kaḍacā*. The man's reputation is beyond reproach, and he was undisputedly very familiar with medieval Bengali literature. The material he saw must have been very convincing.

The BLS is another text that is not quite what it first appears to be. Though it has come to the attention of fewer scholars than did Govindadāsa's *Kaḍacā*, its authenticity too has been questioned, and I join in that questioning. Perhaps the first to publish his skepticism was Bimanbihari Majumdar.

Majumdar treated the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiographical materials as historical documents and accepted the set of biographies of Caitanya (among which many narrative differences exist) as the standard of empirical truth against which he measured the remaining compositions. Few scholars since Majumdar have devoted significant attention to the material treating other Gauḍīya leaders;[71] others, who mention them in passing, seem to have accepted Majumdar's conclusions on faith because of his reputation as a thorough scholar. This situation demonstrates the difficulties one encounters if one attempts to approach religious documents with a historical positivist approach, that is, assuming first

that some texts are more true than others (as Majumdar did with the Caitanya corpus) and, second, that careful application of objective historical research methods will allow one to extract some sort of truth about the lives of the people the texts portray. The truth these texts convey is rather in the faith of their believers and in the larger issue of the motivations for the creation of the works. Dismissing one set of accounts simply because it differs from previously discovered compositions is overlooking the religious motivation for the creation of such texts. As Tony Stewart has observed, agreement among religious narratives does not of itself constitute historical accuracy, unless the historical events can be confirmed by independent testimony from sources other than the believing community.[72] Such agreement rather demonstrates that the authors all held the same view. Conversely, differences among them do not necessarily reflect differing degrees of accuracy but rather different purposes among their authors.

The question of authenticity in the sense of "historical accuracy" is therefore not a valid criterion by which to judge hagiographical material. There is no means to verify any of the "historical" material contained in these texts. Further, even under the best of circumstances, witnesses to the same events will describe those events differently.

Oral transmission is of course quite common in South Asia, so it is possible that this text was preserved orally by interested parties. Still, the historical accuracy of content is extremely difficult to attest. And Indian interest in historiography of the type done in the Western world is unusual until the nineteenth century, when the Victorian concern with origins began to drive academic agendas in Europe and triggered a defensive reaction among South Asian scholars. For all of these reasons I share Biman Bihari Majumdar's skepticism about the "authenticity" of the BLS, though I do not share his reasoning. Majumdar relies largely on variations in narrative accounts to claim some texts are more, or less, authentic than others. Most scholars today recognize that much more than historical reporting is involved in the creation of religious literature, and hagiography in particular, and so look beyond the narrative data to determine the provenance of a given text.

I, on the other hand, am no longer convinced[73] that Acyutacaraṇa Tattvanidhi Caudhurī himself composed the text. At the same time, the anachronistic discussion of kulinism is rather troublesome, as is the complete absence of mention of the text outside the Advaita corpus; both factors militate against taking the putative date of composition at face value. Further, Sukumar Sen mentions BLS in volume 1 of his *Bāṅgalā Sāhityera Itihāsa*, where he describes the book as "of doubtful authenticity."[74] He points out that, while the text is dated 1487, its second verse contains praise of Gaura Gopāla (Caitanya), who was only born in 1486 and had certainly not acquired that epithet by his first birthday.

I am inclined to believe that the manuscript found its way to Caudhurī in more or less the way he describes and that the BLS was probably produced just as Acyutacaraṇa and his colleagues described. Its author may never have intended it for wide distribution. If the BLS was truly never intended for publication, perhaps its author was merely experimenting with his Sanskrit skills and happened to choose the childhood of Advaita to practice on. The author may have planned to produce a lengthy and detailed work, using the text we have as his outline or rough draft, or even as the Sanskrit skeleton for a more elaborate Bengali composition. With no extant manuscript and its trail cold and perhaps a bit suspect, we cannot date the text with any degree of accuracy. It *may* be an old hagiography, though if that were the case, given Advaita's importance, surely it would have surfaced before the crucial period when it appears in the early twentieth century.

While argument from lack of evidence is never satisfactory, the fact remains that, had a text like the BLS been composed in the fifteenth century, someone in the intervening centuries of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava history would have noticed and commented upon it. Writers in Advaita's branch of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism have, by and large, accepted the BLS, while sidestepping questions of its authenticity raised by Bimanbihari Majumdar.[75] Few in the wider Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community, however, seem aware of the existence of the text, and none of the other groups accept the Advaita corpus as canonical. I argue that this questionable authenticity is precisely what makes the BLS worthy of scholarly attention. It apparently appeared suddenly at a time when Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism seemed to have relaxed its social standards to the point of falling into some moral disrepute. The scandalous behavior of some Vaiṣṇavas made the entire school easy fodder for public criticism and occasional satire, even bringing them under moral siege by the British colonizers. Sumanta Banerjee notes that in nineteenth century Bengal "by popular perception they were often guilty of lechery and hypocrisy."[76]

Richard Eaton points out that under Husain Shah (1493–1519) many Hindus were involved in government.[77] During Advaita's lifetime the Vaiṣṇavas were not under political siege from Muslims, but their greatest adversaries were "Brahman supporters of the cults of Chandi and Manasa."[78] Further, they could not have been worried about their leader's fame, as he played a prominent role in the Caitanya hagiographical corpus. They may, however, have been concerned that with dwindling numbers of members his school was in danger of disappearing entirely and so sought to reestablish themselves as the most brahmanically proper of all Vaiṣṇavas, thus perhaps making a heroic last stand. This effort then provides us with a clear look at what that struggling group regarded as most important about itself: its ultimate sectarian legitimacy, traceable to heavenly realms, and its earthly role at the very top of the Bengali brahmanical hierarchy.

Their founder was no ordinary human being and in fact bore an exemplary pedigree, both in terms of his human ancestors and his divine origins. He deserves to be not merely remembered but worshipped. The author's use of Sanskrit subtly signals the sacredness of the events he describes and the veracity of his words.

First, we have the genealogy of Advaita and his pedigree in the upper strata of brahmanical society. His school continues to be very conservative, comprised of top-ranking brahmans. In this respect Advaita's followers remain superior to those of Nityānanda, and the desire to maintain this position may be one of the motivating factors for the production of the BLS and the other works treating Advaita.

Second, the author tells us that Advaita's family has always been involved with local rule in some ways (both his father and grandfather were court *paṇḍitas*, as was an earlier ancestor who advised Rāja Gaṇeśa). This reminds us that the family has always had the ear of the powerful.

Third, we learn that Śāktism was a strong rival for Vaiṣṇavism (as it continues to be), but that the new movement could easily accommodate that competition, absorbing it without destroying it. The author also describes many miracles Advaita performed in his childhood, including instituting the Paṇā Tīrtha and its festival, still celebrated every year.

That is to say, Advaita Ācārya's school had, through the years, remained the most true of all the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to their movement's original ideals—ideals that even predated Caitanya—and thus are the only true Vaiṣṇavas remaining. This assertion, never made overtly but always present as the subtext of Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi's work, is both an act of colonial resistance and, more important, a statement of regional and sectarian pride.

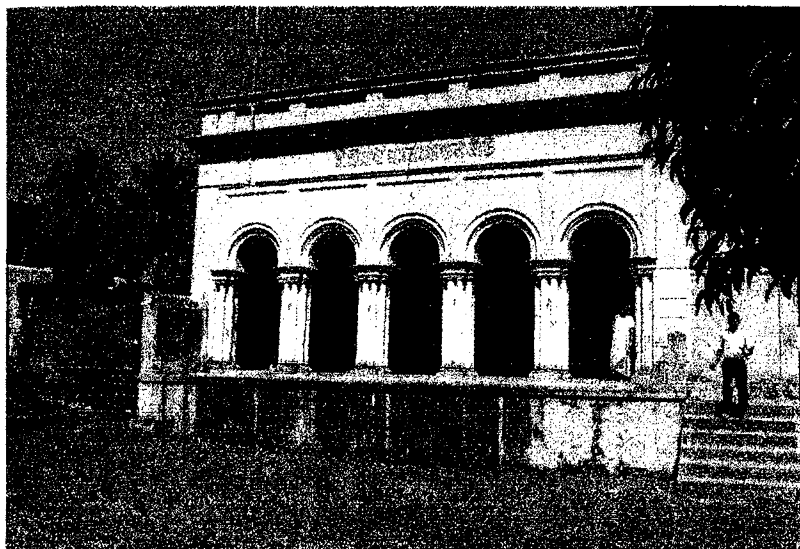
The British gazetteer published just five years after Acyutacarana Caudhurī Tattvanidhi announced the discovery of the *Advaita Prakāśa* confirms the religious diversity of the Sylhet region. The British had largely ignored Sylhet during their early years in South Asia, simply because of its remote location. Two-thirds of the region became part of Bengal in 1765 when Britain acquired the Dīwanī of Bengal; Britain annexed Jaintiā in 1835 when "no satisfaction could be obtained for the murder of three British subjects, who had been kidnapped and sacrificed to the goddess Kali." In 1901 the population of Sylhet District was reported to be just over two million, closely divided between Hindus (53 percent) and Muslims (47 percent). High-caste Hindus constituted the vast majority of the Hindus (though the gazetteer does not clarify what types of Hindus were in the area, we know many were Vaiṣṇavas, and the above citation shows Śāktas also were active locally), and Christians (several Welsh Presbyterians and at least one Catholic priest) had made inroads into the area as well, such that the 1901 survey revealed 394 native Christians in the area.[79]

And finally, when we examine this text alongside other hagiographical works produced by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, it quickly becomes apparent that a template for hagiography was in use. Repeated application of this template across sectarian boundaries is not insignificant and signals to the reader that certain specific qualities and behaviors indicate religious greatness.

The serendipity of BLS falling into Acyutacaraṇa's hands provided him with further impetus to do all he could to serve his guru by resurrecting the name and reputation of their nearly forgotten ancestor. Such a resurrection would then extend to Advaita Ācārya's spiritual descendants, marking them as the one group to have remained true to the ideals and purity of their high-caste progenitor.

He was able to use the contents of the BLS as he worked out his own full hagiography of Advaita Ācārya, as indeed the author of the *Advaita Prakāśa* freely admits having done. He elaborated on the stories of Advaita's childhood sketched in the BLS, fleshing them out with even more miracles and marvels. And that provided him with the pattern for the rest of his composition, a life presented in this version as full of amazing encounters, miraculous deeds, dizzying theophanies, and even secrets about certain events inside the household, most noteworthy of which is the true maternity of Kṛṣṇa Miśra, his second son and heir to his temple worship of the deity Madana Mohana.

We move now to the *Advaita Prakāśa*, the longest hagiography among Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi's three discoveries, to see what else we can learn about Advaita Ācārya's school and, more broadly, about the application of religious biography to sectarian obstacles and problems, in particular, the perceived need to purge the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school of impiety and preserve Advaita Ācārya's school's public image as free of the polluting influences now pervading Bengali society as a whole.



1. *Madan Gopāla Jiu. The young man walking down the stairs is Ranju Goswami, direct descendant of Advaita Ācārya.*



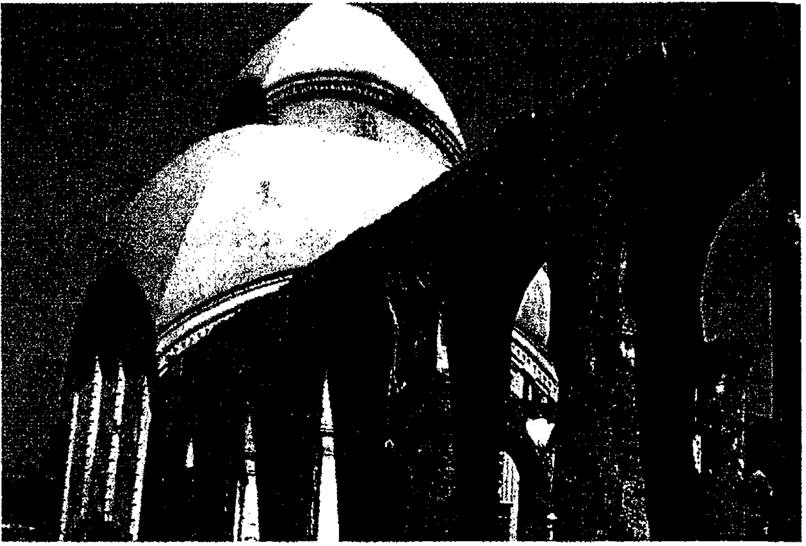
2. *Navagrāma temple deities (left to right) Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, and Advaita Ācārya.*



3. *The Advaita Ācārya deity from Madan Gopāla Jiu in procession on his birthday, January 31, 2001.*



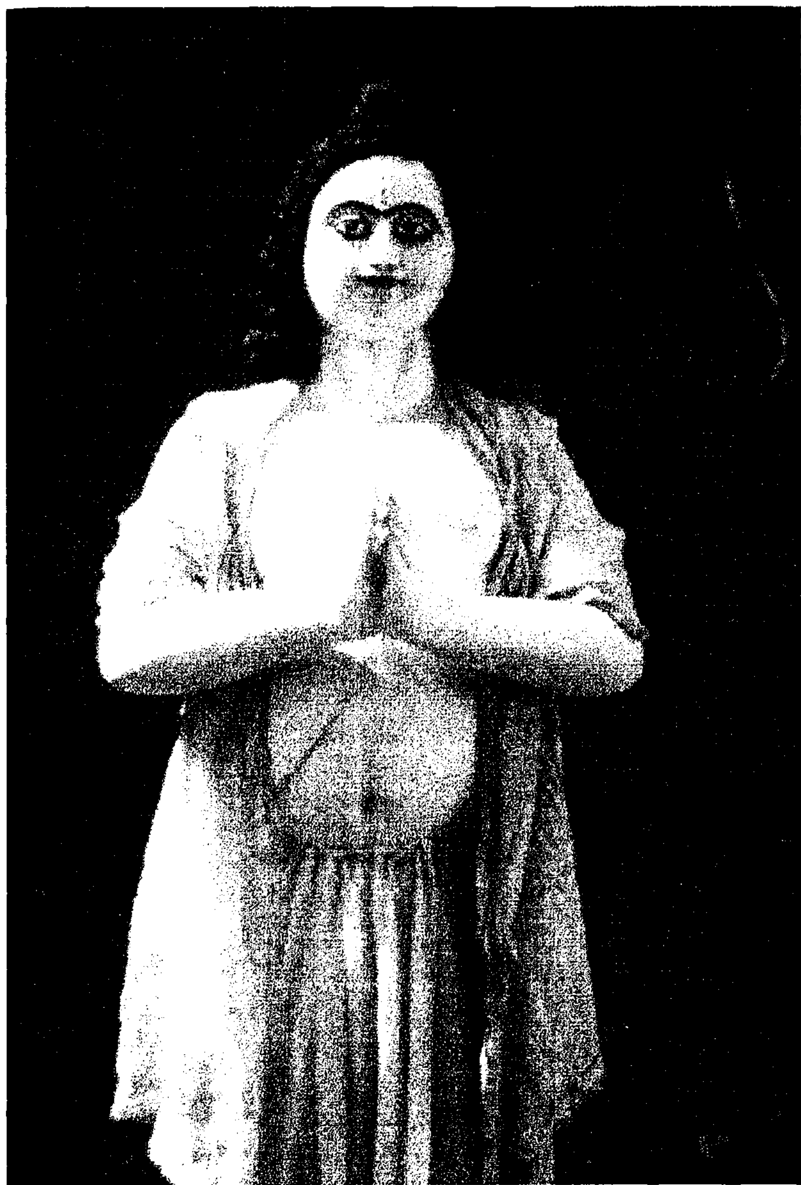
4. *Plaque at Advaita vaṭ in Vṛndāvana marking the place where Advaita is said to have recovered the Madana Mohana image that became his Madana Gopāla.*



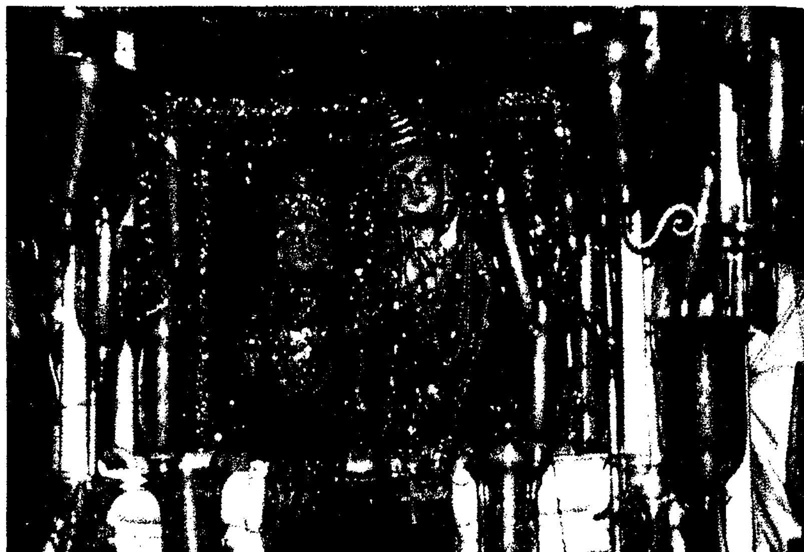
5. *Śyāmasundara Temple (domed building in Shantipur in the background) and the maṇḍapa (foreground) where devotees assemble for prayer and devotional singing.*



6. *The temple at Bābla, outside Shantipur, erected over the spot where Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Goswāmī found Advaita's sandals and water pot.*



7. *Rāsa līlā parade image of Advaita Ācārya.*



8. *The figures of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā on display at Madan Gopāla Jiu.*

9. *Painting of the sankīrtana, "Cānda Kāji Uddhāra Nāgara Kīrtana," a congregational processional chanting through town. Courtesy of Vṛndāvana Research Institute*



10. *Painting of Advaita and Haridāsa.*



6

Advaita Prakāśa

LET US NOW MOVE TO *Advaita Prakāśa,* a text in twenty-two chapters composed in Middle Bengali treating Advaita's entire life, from shortly before his birth until after his death. Several of the stories found in the BLS appear in this text as well in greater detail.

BACKGROUND AND PROVENANCE

Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi first announced his discovery of *Advaita Prakāśa* in the pages of the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* (hereafter BSPP) in 1896.[1] He could not have found a more reputable venue. The Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat remains today the most prestigious of intellectual organizations in Bengal. It was founded in 1894 with the express purpose of collecting treasures of Bengali literature of the past and present. Scholars interested in joining the BSP must be literate in the Bengali language, and the institution is proudly one of the few places in the country where English can never be heard. Thus Acyutacaraṇa's choice of venue for this provocative announcement is far from insignificant.

He opens his article with a lamentation about the lack of much Bengali literature predating Caitanya. He mentions that Murāri Gupta set the literary standard, with his *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛtam,* but that we have very little concerning the activities of Caitanya's important followers Nityānanda and Advaita outside of their activities with Caitanya. He cites the *Advaita Maṅgala* (discussed in chapter 2) and the *Advaita Prakāśa* as the most important works treating Advaita, both composed by Advaita's students and therefore reliable as sources of information about their subject. But since *Advaita Prakāśa* is the older, Acyutacaraṇa is particularly fond of it.

Caudhurī provides some data on Īśāna Nāgara, the author of *Advaita Prakāśa,* which he has apparently gleaned from the text itself. Īśāna reveals his identity bit by bit as the text unfolds. He tells us that Advaita's eldest son Acyuta asked him to write his father's life story. Īśāna himself met Advaita at the age of five, when his widowed mother, an impoverished brahman, approached the very wealthy Advaita for help. The two happened to turn up on Advaita's doorstep on the very festive occasion of his eldest son Acyuta's beginning his education. Sītā Devī received them warmly, heard the mother's sad story, took the little boy Īśāna on her lap, and gave them both places in the household. Acyutacaraṇa tells us this was the year 1497.[2] From that day on the boy and his mother served their guru to the best of their abilities.

As a member of the household, Īśāna was thus well-positioned to observe, and later to comment upon, the doings of the various members of the family. He reports that, after Advaita's death, Sītā asked Īśāna to return to both families, home region of Lāuḍa, in what is now Sylhet, in northeastern Bangladesh, to marry and start a family of his own. Īśāna expresses skepticism over the wisdom of her suggestion, as he is now over seventy years of age, but Sītā reassures him that one of the other Vaiṣṇavas will see to it that he finds a suitable bride, and, indeed, that is what he tells us happens. Finally, Īśāna reports that he finished composing the *Advaita Prakāśa* in the east, in Navagrāma, in the year 1568.

That date, 1568, would make the *Advaita Prakāśa* an earlier composition than Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's monumental *Caitanya Caritāmṛta,* the "final word"[3] on the life of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. Given the mutual referentiality so typical of the Bengali Vaiṣṇava authors, one would expect citations from such an early text to appear in later works, but none of the other hagiographies (outside the Advaita corpus) or theological treatises mention Īśāna's work or even his name. Further, one would expect to find manuscripts of such an early text throughout the important libraries of the region, and yet the only extant manuscript is a very recent one in the possession of Dhaka University.[4] Caudhurī mentions that the book remained unknown until Śrīnātha Gosvāmī, from Dhaka, carefully brought the manuscript down from Lāuḍa to save it.

Caudhurī now switches his discussion to Sylhet, which he points out is not only the birthplace of Advaita Ācārya but also the ancestral home of many other important early figures in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement,[5] including Caitanya himself, as we know from Vṛndāvana Dāsa's *Caitanya Bhāgavata.* Caudhurī mentions Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa's *Bālya-Līlā-Sūtra (BLS),* discussed in the previous chapter. Acyutacaraṇa reminds us that Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa is a reliable witness to Advaita's early life, because he had been the local ruler and Kubera's (Advaita's father's) employer.

Advaita died in 1558 or 1559. Īśāna was totally sunk in his grief, and, as a means to come to grips with his sorrow, it occurred to him, at his guru's son's suggestion, to write all that he had seen of Advaita's life. He relied on the BLS for information on Advaita's childhood and on Advaita's later companions like Padmanābha Cakravarttī, Nityānanda, and Śyāmānanda Ācārya.

In describing its literary merits, Acyutacaraṇa says we cannot properly call the AP classical epic poetry (*kāvya*), nor is it strictly biography. And truly, while one can find a few nicely crafted passages, the general style and vocabulary of the AP are not the sort to inspire rapture among readers. Since its account is somewhat condensed, it is also sometimes called a "notebook," so the text has the alternate name *Īśāna Dasera Kaḍacā* ("Īśāna Dāsa's Notebook").

Acyutacaraṇa concludes his introduction by saying that Īśāna's descendants live in Jhākpāl, near Dhaka, having left Sylhet in 1744 after the Khāsis[6] destroyed the kingdom of Lāuḍa.

Publication History

Caudhurī republished much of his BSPP article in his introduction to the first published edition of AP, which appeared in 1898. An astute reader will detect a slightly vehement tone in that introduction, which I attribute to the rather widespread skepticism that followed Caudhurī's announcement, two years earlier, of his discovery of this text. In that introduction he points out that Īśāna's account included a number of details and events the author had witnessed himself. Thus, Caudhurī continues, there is nothing inaccurate in the book. Anything that appears at first glance to be unlikely contains some hidden historical wonder.

He continues to tell us quite straightforwardly that the AP's age and author are not important, that rather what is important about the text is simply that in its pages is celebrated the wondrous life of Advaita Ācārya. The editor is clearly an admirer, if not a disciple, of Advaita Ācārya.

The second edition of AP, edited by Mṛṇālakānti Ghoṣa,[7] bears the same introduction and no date of publication. The "new edition" of 1926, edited by Satīścandra Mitra, bears a glowing dedication that reads as follows:

> To the tireless literary servant, primary object of (my) devotion, best of Vaiṣṇavas, Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi: You among literati were the original discoverer and editor of this famous Vaiṣṇava book; you were also about to edit this present edition, O Preceptor and Patron; your life from a very young age has been dedicated to the service of Vaiṣṇava literature; you

have mastered all the Vaiṣṇava texts; you have anticipated every question about Vaiṣṇava history and resolved each one. Were you not ill, you would have edited this edition as well, and so I have done so, at your request, and finished it, and I remain full of respect and devotion to you. Satīścandra Mitra, Daulatapura, Khulnā.

Mitra's introduction is considerably longer than Caudhurī's (over thirteen pages versus only four) and opens with the proclamation that AP is an ancient and authentic Vaiṣṇava book, written by a man who spent the better part of fifty years like a shadow to the early greats of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement. The author finished the book in 1568, and it remained hidden for nearly 350 years thereafter. Mitra gives AP's publication history, and thanks Caudhurī for all his help in putting out this edition.

He then begins a lengthy discussion about Īśāna Nāgara's family history, providing much more detail than did Caudhurī. Mitra says he does not know where the Nāgaras were originally from but speculates that they had immigrated to Bengal from Karnataka, like Rūpa and Sanātana's ancestors. Īśāna's father Padmanābha Cakravarttī was from Navagrāma; his mother's name was Padmaṇi Devī; both parents were *siddha śrotriyas*[8] of the Śaṇḍilya *gotra.* Mitra quotes Caudhurī on Īśāna's arrival at Advaita's house.

Mitra goes on to detail Īśāna's life after Advaita's death, when he traveled east to Gopālpur,[9] got married, and began his family. During this time many disciples came to him, and he initiated them. The local *nawab* was so impressed with his devotion that he gave him a large piece of land in Jhākpāl, near Dhaka. But Īśāna knew he could not die until he had fulfilled Sītā's request that he start a family, so he went to Lāuḍa and, in 1568, at the age of seventy-six, finally completed the AP. He died shortly thereafter.

Mitra provides a great deal of detail about Īśāna's descendants, which he says he learned from Bhuvana Mohana Majumdāra of Daulatpur College. For example, Īśāna's eldest son Puruṣottama eventually acquired quite a few followers himself, and the family came to be known as the Nāgara-Advaitas and were considered part of Sītā and Advaita's family.

Mitra says that since the *Caitanya Bhāgavata, Caitanya Maṅgala,* and the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* were all written sometime after *Advaita Prakāśa,* Īśāna could not have consulted them and, since he was writing in distant Lāuḍa, the authors of those works did not have access to his text. His volunteering this information makes one wonder what straw man had asked for it.

In 1932 Mṛṇālakānti Ghoṣa published a third edition, identical to the second edition.

To summarize the publication history,[10] then:

1. First edition, edited and published in Kolkata by Keśavalāla Rāya in 1898.
2. Second edition, edited by Mṛṇālakānti Ghoṣa, no date or publisher given.
3. New edition, edited by Satīścandra Mitra in 1926, published by Aśutoṣa Library in Kolkata.
4. Third edition, edited by Mṛṇālakānti Ghoṣa, published in 1932 by Viśvakoṣa Press in Kolkata.

Each editor discusses the legitimacy of the text, with the arguments becoming more detailed with each subsequent edition. Caudhurī's initial article in the BSPP made no mention of the authenticity question, but he addresses it very early into his introduction to the first edition of the text. Near the beginning of that article he announces that the AP is the earliest of Gauḍīya texts in Bengali. By the time the first edition was published, just two years later, we can surmise that the AP was not garnering the kind of reception Caudhurī had anticipated, because the introduction in many places seems to be attempting to rebut criticism of the text.

Let us now turn to the content of the AP. A full translation is available in a separate volume,[11] so here I will merely summarize, highlighting those portions of the story that differ from the accounts in the AM and the BLS.

Summary of the *Advaita Prakāśa*

Much of the first chapter simply recapitulates the first half of the BLS. Īśāna, however, opens his book quite differently. The god Śiva is lamenting the wickedness he sees on earth in Kali Yuga and sits on the shore of the primeval ocean to meditate on how best to remedy the situation. And there he sits, for seven centuries. Mahāviṣṇu sees him there and, impressed with his determination, summons Śiva into his presence. Śiva offers up endless praises, which Mahāviṣṇu reciprocates. The two embrace, their bodies melting together, to form one single radiant golden body.

At this point a voice rings out from the heavens asking Mahāviṣṇu to descend to earth in this melded form via the womb of Lābhā, promising itself to arrive later, at the home of Śacī and Jagannātha, and adding that the various other devotees will also descend to Nadīyā at the same time. We readers know that that voice belongs to Kṛṣṇa, who for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas sits at the head of the divine hierarchy, outranking both Mahāviṣṇu and Śiva.

Lābhā's husband is Kubera, a man whose name is no coincidence, for he is indeed the god of wealth, who in a previous age had performed all sorts of austerities in the hope that Śiva would be born as his son. He is about to reap his

reward in the current life, in which he is a wealthy and renowned scholar, the son of Nṛsiṁha.

Īśāna tells us that late one night,[12] after she had found herself pregnant, Lābhā dreamed of Hari-Hara[13] radiant and dancing in her heart, shouting out "Hare Kṛṣṇa!" Yama, god of death, hears the commotion and comes running and sees the conjoined form of the two gods. He too begins to shout "Hare Kṛṣṇa," praising Hari-Hara. He also, however, expresses his tremendous concern that, if Hari-Hara descends to earth in this dark Kali Age, he will rescue all the wicked people and leave Yama himself unemployed. And so he asks Hari-Hara to reconsider his plan.[14]

Hari-Hara replies at some length, pointing out by way of reassurance that even he has no power to destroy the karma of someone intent upon evildoing. He promises that he will take birth, and teach the mantra that can destroy the bonds of karma and create devotion to Kṛṣṇa, and that, further, he will cause Svayaṁ Bhagavān to appear as well, along with all his friends and associates. And he agrees not to threaten Yama's duty in any way, because he will not rescue "vile atheists." This appears to satisfy Yama, who then retreats. And Lābhā awakes and reports all this to her husband.

Lābhā's dream first of all establishes Advaita Ācārya as an important, indeed divine, person. More significantly, though, the dream also indicates a desire to enfold other forms of devotionalism into the new Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, which it obliquely suggests is supreme. Throughout *Advaita Prakāśa* Īśāna reminds us that Advaita is himself divine. Others will address him as "Sadāśiva," an epithet suggesting divinity. Notice that in so doing the author has told us in effect that even the mighty god Śiva worships Kṛṣṇa! (As mentioned previously, Tony Stewart has told me that Sadāśiva is the form of Śiva who worships Kṛṣṇa, but I have found no textual verification for this assertion.) Īśāna plays with these sorts of images throughout his composition.

And then on the seventh day of the month of Māgha[15] Lābhā's son is born. Kubera summons the astrologer, who selects the name *Kamalākṣa*, the Lotus-eyed, for the infant. This is the same name we find in the BLS, but Haricaraṇa Dāsa in his AM calls the child Kamalākānta; both names are epithets of Viṣṇu. Īśāna reports that throughout his childhood Kamalākṣa would eat only food that had been first offered to Kṛṣṇa. Within a month of his starting his education, at the traditional age of five, he had learned to read and write.

This is quite different from the AM account of Advaita's birth, in which Vijaya Purī proclaims the infant to be Kṛṣṇa. Both authors are working with the idea of the serial descent of the Vraja *līlā*, but Haricaraṇa posits Advaita as the first degree of Kṛṣṇa to arrive, while Īśāna is working with the idea of a progression

of devotional moods, and his Advaita is the dual embodiment of Mahāviṣṇu and Śiva, whom devotees approach with awed reverence.

The next two chapters deal with events in Kamalākṣa's childhood. Chapter 2 opens with an elaboration of an account found, in a much condensed version, in chapter 4 of the BLS. Lābhā has another auspicious dream, again very late at night. This time she sees that her infant son is both Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu, complete with four arms and all of Viṣṇu's usual accoutrements: conch, lotus, discus, and mace. She falls at his feet, and Kamalākṣa asks her why she is doing this, since one's parents are the guru and should not bow before their children. She replies that since he is Sadāśiva, guru of the whole world, how can he possibly have a mother? And since he is Mahāviṣṇu, creator of the universe, she would like to drink the water used to wash his feet, which is said to confer liberation.

The boy tells her not to speak like this and makes a counteroffer to bring her all the South Asian *tīrthas* (pilgrimage sites)[16] to enjoy. And at that point Lābhā awakens. Her son insists she tell him what she has just dreamed, and, as in the dream, he promises to bring her all the sites so that she can bathe in them the next morning.

Just as he has promised, next morning all the *tīrthas* arrive and ask why Kamalākṣa has summoned them. The child asks them to come live on the mountainside there, but the *tīrthas* point out that their doing so would nullify the salvific effects of their former places of residence. The compromise solution is that the *tīrthas* will come one day a year, the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Caitra.[17] Kamalākṣa sends the various waters to the top of the mountain, asking them to form a waterfall there. He takes his mother to the mountain and begins to worship it, blowing a conch and ringing a bell, and the waters start to flow down the mountainside. The boy encourages his mother to bathe, telling her how beautiful she will look immersed in the sacred waters, and shows her that the waters from each individual *tīrtha* are a different color (the Yamunā's waters are dark, the Gaṅgā's sparkle like crystal, etc.).

Īśāna reports that this site is now known as Paṇā Tīrtha because it is the place where promises (*paṇa*) are kept, that is, that the Lord fulfills all the desires of pilgrims who bathe here. Bringing all the *tīrthas* together is the child's first major miracle. This story is also found in the BLS, but not elsewhere.

The chapter also describes Kamalākṣa's uncanny academic abilities, another standard indication of greatness. He memorized every verse he heard, immediately, and mastered all the grammatical and other treatises in three years.

In this chapter we also find a greatly expanded version of the story of Kamalākṣa's encounters with the goddess, which we saw in the BLS.

The account of the first encounter with the goddess is the same as in BLS, but it ends with Īśāna's comment that Kubera is troubled by what he had witnessed.

Eventually Kubera has his son formally initiated into his position in brāhmanical society with his sacred thread ceremony, and his education proceeds. And before long the boy has another adventure with the goddess. This version of the story begins in the same way as the second account in the BLS, but here the boy replies to the king that he will not bow before the goddess because he bows to Svayaṁ Bhagavān alone, God Himself,[18] and that the wise would do well to follow his example.

Īśāna's use of the term *Svayaṁ Bhagavān* is quite striking, for we do not find it elsewhere in this sense until after the *gosvāmīs* Rūpa and Jīva elaborate Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. Its appearance here is a theological anachronism and forces us to question the purported date of composition of this text.

Kamalākṣa's father, who sides with the king, is forced to consider what his son has said, as in the BLS, and so he begins to debate with the boy. The arguments here, however, are slightly different. Kubera insists that the one Brahmā has many forms, and so one should not display antagonism to any of them. He points out that even Lord Rāma, who, he reminds the boy, was actually Nārāyaṇa,[19] worshipped the goddess before he embarked on his journey to rescue his kidnapped wife Sītā.

Kamalākṣa, as politely as he can manage, tells his father of the importance of single-minded devotion, saying that just as one waters a tree at its base to ensure that all the leaves and branches above are nourished, so one should worship Nārāyaṇa because he is the root of all gods and goddesses. He goes on to state that Viṣṇu's creation is the physical manifestation of the goddess and that we mortals tend to forget this fact and allow ourselves to be distracted by the world. And further, people should not offer the goddess animal sacrifices, for if she is truly the mother of the world, then the world is her son, and how can killing her children be scripturally enjoined?

Kubera, by now becoming somewhat aggravated, retorts that killing animals for sacrifice does not constitute a violent act, because those animals gain liberation and go directly to heaven.[20]

This argument against animal sacrifice is a polemic against the animal slaughter necessary for the consumption of meat. Brahmans, and Vaiṣṇavas, had historically been enjoined to a vegetarian diet. By the late nineteenth century, however, many had fallen away from this practice and consequently Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas as a group had become subjects of public ridicule as hypocritical.

Some of the best evidence of contemporary social trends is the vast output of Kolkata artists, and particularly those of the Kalighat School. One well-known painting depicts a fat cat with the familiar Vaiṣṇava v-shaped marking on his forehead, with a large shrimp in his mouth.[21] This criticism had become so commonplace that the author of the AP felt he must respond to it, and in a

way that made it clear that such behavior was neither Vaiṣṇava nor something Advaita Ācārya himself had practiced.

Kamalākṣa now changes the subject, asking with apparent frustration why it is so difficult to save one's own parents from cycling endlessly through *samsāra*. Eventually, remembering that the parents are the guru, he desists, out of respect for his father, and agrees to bow to the goddess.

And as he does so, the goddess retreats from the image, and as soon as that divine presence leaves the sculpture, the stone cracks. But what happened to the goddess herself? Īśāna explains that as her soul came into contact with her husband's, i.e., Kamalākṣa's, these two beings merged. Kamalākṣa now takes on the form of Hari-Hara, and vanishes, reciting praises of the fair lord yet to come.

He was then twelve years old and next appeared in Shantipur, where he would progress to higher education with the study of the six philosophical systems.

Īśāna, like Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa, provides two separate but similar accounts treating the goddess. The AP stories are the most detailed, though they do not include the philosophical discussion (found in AM) between Kamalākṣa and King Divyasiṁha afterwards on the merits of Kṛṣṇa worship over goddess worship and how the king can incorporate the latter into the former. At its conclusion in the AM version, the boy and his parents move to Shantipur, while in the AP version the boy simply vanishes, to reappear later in Shantipur.

Chapter 3 describes the last period of the boy's academic training. His parents, still back in Navagrāma, miss him terribly. Now it is Kubera who has a dream, in which Gopāla appears to him to remind him of his son's identity, which this time is stated in the familiar terms of Advaita's role in the *pañcatattva*, the pentumvirate considered the backbone of the first generation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism.[22]

In the morning Kubera and Lābhā decide to travel west to see their son and live out their lives on the bank of the Gaṅgā in Shantipur. Following a tearful reunion, Kubera instructs his son to learn the Vedas and the *Brahma Sūtras* next, and so Kamalākṣa moves to neighboring Pūrṇabāti to study with Śānta Vedāntabāgīśa.

Īśāna then repeats the story we found in chapter 8 of the BLS, of Kamalāksa and the lotus in the snake-infested lake. Kamalākṣa reminds his amazed guru that the world is part of the Lord Hari and anyone with a pure heart who has taken refuge in Hari automatically acquires magical powers.[23] And then he elaborates, privately, but no one other than Śānta hears what he says.

In time, Kamalākṣa completes his studies and asks permission to return to his parents. Śānta agrees, with the proviso that he be allowed to see the boy

merely by thinking of him. The two embrace fondly, and then the boy simply vanishes.

Īśāna, unlike Haricaraṇa Dāsa, has quite a lot to say about Advaita Ācārya's childhood. Īśāna admits borrowing from the BLS, which treats only the early years, and so this story of Śānta's lotus is exclusive to the BLS and the AP.

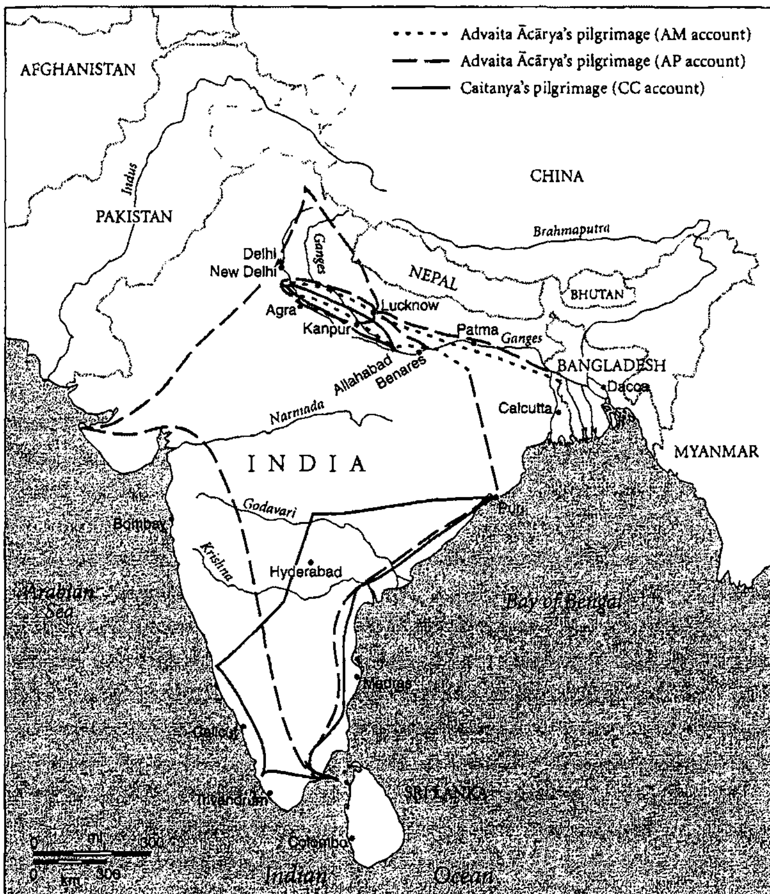
Thus far in AP, to recap, we have seen the small boy's ability to command nature (by bringing the pilgrimage sites together), his ability to vanish at will, and his ability to walk on water. Three miraculous demonstrations, and the boy is only twelve years old.

His parents are delighted to have their son back. He cares for the aging couple for the remaining year of their lives. They die at the age of ninety[24] and are carried off to Viṣṇu's heaven of Vaikuṇṭha in a flying flower chariot. And, as his father had requested, Kamalākṣa carries their ashes to the holy city of Gayā to perform the requisite rituals.

The young man decides to travel from Gayā to the city of Puri,[25] another important Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage town. This is only the beginning of an entire circumambulation of India in which he visits all the important pilgrimage places in South Asia, both south and north. His route is shown on the map, along with both the AM version of Advaita's pilgrimage and the CC version of Caitanya's own pilgrimage following the death of his father. While the CC pilgrimage (CC 2.7–2.9) lists more sites by name, the map clearly shows that Advaita's voyage covered more territory. In both cases, however, once the traveler leaves the familiar territory of Bengal and Orissa, the itinerary in the texts makes little geographic sense and seems to be little more than a list of obligatory stops on a *tīrtha-yātrā*, in no particular order. While Haricaraṇa Dāsa covers this pilgrimage tour, he does so with far less detail than does Īśāna.

Kamalākṣa visits temples all along his route, and in each temple exhibits progressively greater devotional frenzy. He travels all the way to Setubandha at the southern tip of the subcontinent, where Hanuman's armies built the bridge for Rāma to cross from the mainland to Laṅkā to rescue Sītā, and falls into a trance in which he believes himself to be Sītā suffering the pains of separation from her husband.

Eventually he arrives at "Madhvācārya's place," still in south India, where he is able to hear Madhva's[26] commentaries on two important devotional texts, the *Śāṇḍilya Sūtra* and the *Nārada Sūtra*. Here too he meets Mādhavendra Purī, who recognizes the pure devotion the young man is exhibiting from the telltale marks on his body. Meanwhile Kamalākṣa has become so overcome with his own devotion that he faints. Mādhavendra's students surround him and revive him by crying out "Hari, Hari!" Advaita cycles through several different devotional moods, and eventually calms down and resumes his normal conscious-



Pilgramage Routes for Advaita Ācārya and Caitanya

ness. He then introduces himself, asking Mādhavendra Purī to accept him as his disciple. He memorizes Madhva's commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as soon as Mādhavendra recites it to him, much to everyone's amazement.

One day Advaita asks his guru how he can save humanity from the wickedness he sees around him in these degenerate times. Mādhavendra replies, expressing his wonder at the boy's compassion, that the only remedy for the problems of the world would be for Svayaṁ Bhagavān to appear. And, the guru continues, according to the *Ananta Saṁhitā*,[27] he will appear soon. In the *Ananta Saṁhitā* Advaita reads that Svayaṁ Bhagavān will take birth in Navadvīpa to rescue the world with the name of Hari. He vows on the spot to find this *Gaurāṅga*, the

man with the fair complexion, and departs fairly soon thereafter to continue his pilgrimage around the subcontinent.

On his way back to Bengal he passes through the land of Mithilā and, after visiting the birthplace of Sītā, he begins to hear someone singing a very beautiful song in praise of Kṛṣṇa. He follows the voice to find a brahman seated under a tree singing like an angel. He stands listening for some time, engrossed in that same love of Kṛṣṇa, and then embraces the man. Advaita tells him how much he has been enjoying his singing and asks who he is. The man explains that he is Vidyāpati (c. 1352–1448) and that he serves at the court of his king and has gone crazy with devotion and composed the song he has been singing.

Advaita is pleased to have met the poet Vidyāpati, and praises him, saying that his song could attract Kṛṣṇa himself. And then he goes on his way.

This episode, in which Advaita meets the celebrated devotional poet, his near contemporary, exemplifies one of the standard tools that hagiographers often use. Here our subject meets and converses with an established luminary. We readers are of course familiar with Vidyāpati's name and his poems describing the love between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. That meeting first displays the luminary's interest in the newcomer, which is in itself a minor endorsement of the protagonist. Their encounter usually concludes with the luminary resoundingly endorsing the younger person and his/her entire mission. Here the luminary accepts Kamalākṣa's embrace, and that embrace further stimulates his own divine love. But this meeting is chronologically suspect, as Advaita would have been too young to have met the poet.

Hagiographers often blur temporal boundaries, using that blur as a rhetorical device to describe their characters as more than human. The author is "seeing history from a point of view outside time and passing moral judgment on certain individuals."[28] He is creating a biographical image for his character in keeping with certain universal notions of the hero as superhuman.

Such incongruous features of religious biography as "chronological implausibilities offensive to the historical basis of objective research principles,"[29] Rupert Snell discusses, are actually revealing of the attitudes and beliefs of a given religious community. Kṛṣṇa in any of his forms cannot be constrained by mundane limitations, including time. Further, those beings possessed of any part of divinity have a natural mutual affinity, for god in human form loves to sing and hear his own praises and so is drawn to others with the same interests. This is explicitly true among Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, who repeatedly tell us that Kṛṣṇa chose to be born together with Rādhā as Caitanya so that he could experience his own sweetness.

Vidyāpati was and continues to be a beloved favorite son of Bengal. Because his poetry was devotional in nature, he too partakes in this Vaiṣṇava love of and

attraction for the divine. It is entirely theologically consistent for Advaita Ācārya and Vidyāpati to have met, even though it strains historical credulity.

Continuing on his tour, in Vārāṇasī Kamalākṣa visits all the temples and bathing piers and meets Vijaya Purī, a great scholar of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. They discuss BhP for many nights, lost in ecstasy. This must be the same Vijaya Purī who plays such a major role at the beginning of the AM, but this brief encounter constitutes his only appearance in the AP.

And of course Kamalākṣa travels to the region of Vraja, home of the activities of the young Kṛṣṇa. His activities in Vraja are described in greater detail here than they were in the AM. He rolls in the dust of all the sacred sites. Finally he falls asleep under a banyan tree and has a remarkable dream. Kṛṣṇa appears to him at his most beautiful, with a peacock feather in his hair, flute at his lips, dressed in yellow garments (a reminder of Rādhā's golden complexion) with gold anklets on his feet. The divine youth announces to Advaita, "You are part of me," and proceeds to explain that he (Advaita) will become the source of a great wave of love. He reminds the young man that he is the most compassionate Gopeśvara Śiva and that he has been born for the sake of all humanity. He further commands him to restore the lost sites of Kṛṣṇa's activities in Vraja and to preach devotion, and to rescue living beings with the name of Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa continues, telling Advaita that he will find the bejewelled Madana Mohana image that Kubjā used to worship, hidden in a bower, covered with dirt at a particular pilgrimage place on the bank of the Yamunā. And, with that, Kṛṣṇa disappears and Advaita wakes up, full of love, and begins dancing and singing the name of Hari. People hear this and come to find out what is going on, and he asks all the villagers to help him raise the image Kṛṣṇa had told him about in the dream.

Everyone runs off to fetch tools and, after a great deal of effort, they manage to excavate the image, just as beautiful as Kṛṣṇa had described it. The townspeople quickly build a little hut under a banyan tree in which to install the image, and Advaita hires a local brahman to serve the image.

Meanwhile some Muslim youths have learned of this image and decide to destroy it. Madana Mohana himself becomes worried and hides under some flowers, changing himself into a Gopāla image.[30] The Muslim boys enter the temple but can not find the image and go away frustrated.

In the morning when the priest comes for the first rituals of the day, he cannot find the image and so returns home, very upset. A neighborhood child tells him who had been to the temple, and the priest assumes the boys have stolen the image.

That evening Advaita hears the story and weeps to find the temple empty. But he realizes that Kṛṣṇa must have simply hidden to avoid danger. He falls asleep, and Madana Mohana appears to him in a dream, explaining that he has

transformed into Gopāla and is hiding among the flowers, but will be visible to Advaita alone, because of the devotion in Advaita's eyes.

And, sure enough, when Advaita enters the temple, he finds Gopāla exactly where Madana Mohana had told him to look. He falls into a trance of devotional ecstasy and comes out of it to offer Gopāla fruit and water, and then he himself eats that consecrated food. He later meets the priest bathing at the river and gives him just the barest details of the story. The brahman can not believe the image is indeed in the temple, but Advaita just says, "Kṛṣṇa cannot abandon his devotee," and sends the man to perform the morning rituals using the name Madana Gopāla. And, ever since, that particular image has been known by the name of Madana Gopāla instead of Madana Mohāna.

That image appears yet again to Advaita in a dream, this time explaining that a brahman will come from nearby Mathurā to take it. Advaita does not want to relinquish this treasure, but Kṛṣṇa offers him a painting of himself that Viśākhā had made long ago to console Rādhā, telling Advaita that that painting is also no different from Kṛṣṇa and that he will find it in the nearby Forest of Nikuñja. Eventually Advaita succumbs to Kṛṣṇa's will and agrees to hand Madana Gopāla over to this brahman, carrying the painting home with him to Shantipur.

A somewhat different version of this story of the recovery of the Madana Gopāla image appearing in the AM account includes more backstory from the original eternal Vraja and does not mention the image's transformation from Madana Mohana to Madana Gopāla.[31] Haricaraṇa borrows the story the Puṣṭī Mārgiyas tell about Mādhavendra Purī's discovery of an image[32] and ascribes it to Advaita Ācārya. Īśāna carries the tale still further by explaining that this same image is the one that eventually made its way back to Advaita's own temple in Shantipur. That very image, the family claims, is still housed in the Madana Gopāla temple in Shantipur. It is now too old and worn to be used for worship, and so has been placed in careful storage behind locked doors, Advaita's modern descendants tell me, and its replacement now occupies the place of honor in that temple.

Chapter 5 features Mādhavendra Purī's visit to Advaita in Shantipur. Mādhavendra Purī falls into an ecstatic rapture at the sight of the painting of Kṛṣṇa that Advaita had brought back from Vraja. He asks Advaita to commission a painting of Rādhā, so that he can worship the divine couple as a unit. He also asks Advaita to marry so that his sons can help spread devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Advaita expresses his fears regarding marriage, concerned that any mistake on his part could eventually doom his whole family.[33] In reply Mādhavendra promises him that his lineage will accrue no sin for fourteen generations.

Since Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī was the tenth generation, and born in 1841, the fourteenth generation is likely to be the generation active when Acyutacaraṇa published this text. This is an interesting promise and may constitute a sly hint

concerning the true provenance of this text and the belief of a disciple that his mild deception in the interest of family and sectarian pride will bring him no ill karmic consequences.

This differs radically from Haricaraṇa's account of this meeting. While Haricaraṇa's Mādhavendra Purī does eventually ask Advaita to marry, the bulk of the conversation between the two in the AM concerns *parakīya* love, the mood in which the guru instructs his disciple to worship. The notion of *parakīya* love is prominent in the AM but does not appear at all in the AP. This glaring difference between the two hagiographies suggests that the author of the AP wanted to present a very respectable image of his protagonist, a man who performed miracles but whose conduct was always impeccable.

Agreeing, Advaita proceeds to install the two paintings and worships them with all due ceremony. Mādhavendra remains in Shantipur a few days longer, initiating those who are interested in the Kṛṣṇa mantra, and then announces his intention to travel to Puri because Gopāla had asked him for some sandal paste.[34] He elaborates to explain that Gopāla appeared to him in a dream complaining of the heat and commenting that some special sandal paste from Puri would cool him down.

And so he heads south, and in the town of Remuṇā, where Gopīnātha had appeared, again falls into an ecstatic trance, raising his arms and dancing. A series of brief anecdotes describing Mādhavendra's service of Gopīnātha follows, all of which serve to illustrate Mādhavendra Purī's tremendous devotional fervor. That attitude would seem to belie the monism suggested by his monastic title. At the same time it connects Advaita Ācārya, and subsequently all of the Gauḍīyas, with a brand of religion much older than we had heretofore been given reason to believe. Mādhavendra Purī is the link between the southern devotionalists, already active for quite some time, and the Gauḍīyas. And his position in one of Śaṅkara's orders also lends him the respectability that adheres to a long-established religious group. Īśāna shows us the high regard in which Mādhavendra Purī held his disciple Advaita Ācārya. His respectability passes on to Advaita Ācārya, who subsequently lends it to the entire Bengali community of Vaiṣṇavas.

In chapter 6 Īśāna finally tells us how Kamalākṣa, at this point called Veda Pañcānana, the Śiva of the Vedas, for his academic achievements, came to be known as Advaita Ācārya. The Śyāmadāsa who conferred that name may be the unnamed Digvijayī of the AM story. Īśāna's story is much more elaborate than Haricaraṇa's, but the narrative thread is essentially the same in both accounts.

To continue the story: Śyāmadāsa, a brahman scholar who has heard of the young man's erudition, comes to Shantipur to challenge him to debate. Śyāmadāsa is a good man who has spent quite some time performing austerities in Vārāṇasī, worshipping Śiva. This behavior pleased Śiva, who then declared that this brahman would be known far and wide as a master of debate.

Śyāmadāsa and Advaita debate, as described in the AM. When Śyāmadāsa recognizes his defeat, he fears that he has somehow lost favor with Śiva. Just then a voice resounds from the heavens, announcing that the man who has just defeated him was actually Hara-Hari, the dual embodiment of Śiva and Viṣṇu, known, for that reason, as Advaita, the one who has no second (in the AM version, the goddess Sarasvātī makes this announcement). Śyāmadāsa begs Advaita's forgiveness, and Advaita rewards him with the vision of his true form. At this point both men begin singing Hare Kṛṣṇa and dancing, and Advaita, anachronistically and inexplicably, begins urging the other man to cry out "Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and Nityānanda!"

At this point Śyāmānanda asks Advaita for mantra initiation and instruction in the proper worship of Kṛṣṇa. After a brief period of study, he returns to his own home.

All the while Advaita becomes more and more consumed with how he will be able to rescue humanity from its unrighteousness and lack of Kṛṣṇa worship, since Svayaṁ Bhagavān has not yet appeared.

Around this time King Divyasiṁha of Lāuḍa arrives. By now he has renounced Śāktism and become an ardent Vaiṣṇava. Advaita is delighted to see him, initiates him with the Kṛṣṇa mantra, and gives him the name Kṛṣṇadāsa. Īśāna reminds us that this is the man who will compose the BLS and that at the end of his life he would travel to Vraja.

In chapter 7 Īśāna introduces Haridāsa. Originally a Muslim, Haridāsa is such an anomalous figure that his presence in the community seems to require explanation. Although Caitanya apparently insisted that anyone who loved Kṛṣṇa automatically became a brahman, few nonbrahmans played any role in the leadership of the young group. So rarely did anyone of lower status rise to the fore that the presence of significant figures who managed to do so required explanation. Īśāna uses a popular story from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.13–14) to account for Haridāsa's place in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community and illustrate Advaita's power to elevate him to such stature. Haridāsa's story confirms Advaita in his role as the sectarian leader whose brahmanical integrity cannot be questioned or overturned.

This story tells of a time when the god Brahmā carried off the calves and cowherd boys of Vraja so that he could enjoy watching the child Kṛṣṇa and the play of his magic. Kṛṣṇa, being omniscient, realizes who has taken his companions and why and, to please Brahmā and to keep his friends' mothers happy, he makes himself appear as all those boys and calves who had been abducted.[35]

This story also appears in the Caitanya hagiographical literature (CC 2.21.43–72), there with the different emphasis on Brahmā's realization of Kṛṣṇa as supreme and himself as relatively insignificant.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* story gave the Gauḍīya leaders a framework to explain why Haridāsa, born Muslim, would be attracted to, and accepted into, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Haridāsa could then be explained as Brahmā atoning for his past arrogance (a notion that also conveniently described Vaiṣṇava perceptions of Muslims, without their having to malign their neighbors directly). Then his conversion erases all the sins of his unfortunate birth and restores him to his proper place in the world as a member of the community of devotees of Kṛṣṇa.

The overlaid story of Brahmā passing through successive gates, guarded by Brahmās with successively more heads, further highlights Brahmā's growing understanding of himself, and the other gods, as of no significance next to Kṛṣṇa. Every universe—and there are an infinite number of universes—has its own Brahmā, Śiva, and Indra, and each god is ignorant of his counterparts elsewhere. Kṛṣṇa alone is unique.

But Īśāna has more to say about Haridāsa. He brings us back to his own time, to tell us that Haridāsa was born in the village of Budāna in the year 1450 C.E. He acknowledges the stories that this boy was Prahlāda,[36] but lets us know that Advaita says that Haridāsa was both Brahmā and Prahlāda. The use of Prahlāda, son of a terrible demon king, simply highlights the notion of a child devoted to Kṛṣṇa born into the wrong environment. The text tells us further that, even though this boy was raised in a Muslim family, he would drink only milk, accepting no solid food from his Muslim parents (for to do so would be to subject himself to pollution, in brahman eyes), and chanted the name of Hari from a very early age. He left home when he was only five and found his way to Advaita's place in Shantipur. Advaita immediately recognized the radiant child standing before him as Brahmā and welcomed him into his house to study with the other boys. We learn that Haridāsa mastered the six philosophical systems, grammar, literature, etc., and memorized the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other scriptures as soon as he heard them. The ability to master so much material so rapidly is an indication of an exceptional individual and usually a feature of hagiographical literature.

Haridāsa himself seems to have had concerns about his own origins, because Advaita is constantly commenting on them. He tells the young boy that anyone in whom devotion arises, even a Muslim (a group the author has just demonized a few verses earlier), is considered a brahman. Advaita launches into a lengthy discourse on the virtues of the name of Kṛṣṇa, repetition of which will erase all sins and fulfill all desires. He states further that the ascetic Vaiṣṇava life is best of all and that one who is serious about such pursuits should dress appropriately and apply the proper marks to his body. And so he shaves Haridāsa's head, places a *tūlasī* necklace around his neck, and applies the sectarian markings to his body. He ties a loincloth around his waist and initiates him with the name of Hari. Thereafter Haridāsa makes a practice of reciting the name of Hari

three hundred thousand times every day before he begins to preach, displaying far more dedication than most of the brahman-born Vaiṣṇavas. He is able to debate quite effectively, impressing many accomplished scholars with his erudition, and makes many converts.

Īśāna devotes more space to Haridāsa than any of the other authors of the Advaita Ācārya corpus. Haricaraṇa seems to feel the need to account not just for Haridāsa's presence but also for the closeness between Advaita, an otherwise very orthodox brahman, and Haridāsa. He introduces Haridāsa as Advaita's servant but makes no reference, at first, to his Muslim origin. Rather he uses Haridāsa to allow Advaita Ācārya to reveal his true theological identity and only later does Advaita talk about Haridāsa's history. He uses the imagery of Haridāsa as Brahmā, who is inseparable from Viṣṇu, to do so. Īśāna adds to this the equation of Haridāsa with Prahlāda, to show that anyone, regardless of birth, can worship Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu.

In chapter 8 Advaita at last acts on Mādhavendra Purī's command that he marry. Īśāna describes the romance between Advaita Ācārya and his two wives in this chapter and does so in terms that seem almost erotic against the rest of the text. Up until this point in the narrative, Advaita has never demonstrated any interest in family life. Now, however, he has been commanded by his elders to marry and produce progeny, to generate a lineage to carry on his work. Further, a good wife would be able to take care of him properly, alleviating many of his domestic burdens.

By the time Advaita does marry he is no longer young, and yet the two young sisters, Sītā and Śrī, fall hopelessly in love with him the moment they first see him. Sītā surprisingly proclaims, "If I cannot have this man, I'll die!"

When Advaita invites the girls and their father Nṛsiṁha Bhāduḍī into his home, he transforms his house into a palace and appears in his four-armed form, seated on a crystal throne dressed in silks and gold, wearing flower garlands, and surrounded by servants and courtiers. The author seems to want his readers to know that all the actors in this scene are aware of Advaita's true theological identity and their own individual roles in relation to him.

Sometime after the marriage takes place, Mādhavendra Purī appears to Sītā in a dream to initiate her in the Kṛṣṇa mantra so that her husband will not be polluted by eating the food she, at this point a non-Vaiṣṇava, cooks. Just as we saw in the case of Haridāsa that converting to Vaiṣṇavism bestows brahmanical privilege on anyone, here Īśāna tells us that failure to become Vaiṣṇava removes that privilege from those born to it.

In the morning she relates her dream to her husband, who again bestows the mantra on her, as scriptures decree that the wife must receive initiation from her husband.

In chapter 9 we return to Haridāsa, whose history we learned in chapter 7. At this point Haridāsa continues to be concerned about issues of purity and

pollution and does not want Advaita to lose caste over their friendship. He asks permission to remove himself to conduct his worship, and Advaita reluctantly agrees. He also tells Haridāsa yet again that he recognizes no caste distinctions based on birth, because one's actions alone determine status and anyone who worships Kṛṣṇa has the highest caste of all.

And so Haridāsa betakes himself to the nearby village of Phuliya. Haridāsa converts many of the villagers who come to see him. Eventually it occurs to him that it might not be good for a renunciate to stay in one place for any length of time, lest he form improper attachments, and so he leaves for Venapola, where he stays deep in the forest. Still, people manage to find him, attracted by the sound of his devotional singing.

At this point Īśāna tells a story not found in any of the other Advaita Ācārya hagiographies. The same story, though not verbatim, appears in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 3.3.91–135. A prostitute comes to Haridāsa, all decked out in her best finery, and suggests that he quit all the religious activity and have some fun with her. Haridāsa, completely unaffected and not tempted in the least, orders her to leave, saying anyone not dressed as a Vaiṣṇava is vile and wicked and not to be taken seriously.

The next evening she returns, now wearing the *tūlasī* necklace that adorns all initiated Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas and with the appropriate sectarian marks on her forehead. She sits in his doorway chanting "Hari, Hari!" Īśāna tells us that mere association with holy men, or dressing like one, even hypocritically, confers great spiritual benefits. And when Haridāsa hears this hypocritical woman chanting the name of Hari, he is overwhelmed with divine love. The woman confesses her identity and profession, saying that she has come in the hope that he will have mercy on her. And so he asks her to chant sincerely, and, listening to his chanting, the woman's mind floats away on his goodness. She realizes the evil of her ways and asks for initiation then and there.

Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja places this episode in a much more significant context. In the CC version the prostitute is actually in the employ of the local (Muslim) governor. Her mission is to seduce Haridāsa away from Vaiṣṇavism and back to Islam. Needless to say, she fails utterly.

Haridāsa of course complies and shaves her head as penance.[37] He whispers the proper mantra in her ear and gives her the name Kṛṣṇadāsī, "maidservant of Kṛṣṇa." From then on she stays in that place reciting the Name, and he moves on to another.

Over the course of his career Haridāsa converted many Muslims to Vaiṣṇavism. But not all Muslims were pleased with his behavior. News of these conversions reached the local ruler, who felt that Islam was suffering because of Haridāsa's activities. He sends his servants to arrest Haridāsa, and they torture him and

bring him into court at the end of a rope. The ruler questions him and gives him the chance to say his prayers in the Muslim manner, but Haridāsa repudiates the Koran, first with an argument against the consumption of beef (the second vegetarian polemic in the AP) and then with an argument against the idea of a formless God. Most people who hear this assume he must be a Sufi, but then he reveals his true form,[38] and everyone present becomes afraid. The ruler submits to Haridāsa and apologizes, and asks him for Vaiṣṇava initiation.

After converting the entire court, Haridāsa leaves for Kulia, to the south, and takes refuge in a cave to meditate and chant. Nearby villagers hear his chanting and come to investigate. They are simultaneously amazed and terrified to see a snake entranced with the chanting, the jewel in its hood glistening, coiled before Haridāsa. But Haridāsa just wraps the snake around his neck and gives it the mantra, and the snake begins to dance with divine love, its eyes flowing with tears, lowering its head repeatedly to the feet of Haridāsa. And right before their eyes the snake vanishes and, Īśāna says, goes to Vṛndāvana in a four-armed form.[39]

Eventually Haridāsa finds himself back in Shantipur, where a series of events involving the local *kulīna* brahmans and the issue of the importance of caste transpires. The community repeatedly threatens to outcaste Advaita Ācārya if he continues to house and associate with Haridāsa. Their efforts are foiled, however, when they learn that the mysterious renunciate whom they have been honoring for some time now is actually this same Haridāsa. The brahmans are forced to to acknowledge that Haridāsa is not the wicked man they had assumed and that, further, their emphasis on caste is misplaced.

Advaita acknowledges their realization with a display of his true form as Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva conjoined in a single body, which leaves the brahmans weeping and trembling.

Up until this point we have seen Haridāsa convert the entire (Muslim) court to Vaiṣṇavism, charm a snake into giving up its inherent nature to be reborn in Vṛndāvana, and heal the lame, blind, and sick. Now he maligns the community into which he was born. The message of this entire section on Haridāsa and his postconversion adventures seems to be to demonstrate that Vaiṣṇavism is available to anyone, even to those of unthinkably low birth (for Muslims are officially beyond the whole caste system). Once a person becomes a Vaiṣṇava and is properly initiated with the sacred mantra, he or she becomes as praiseworthy as a brahman, with all the rights and powers attached to that rank.

Īśāna stresses particular behaviors as prerequisite for brahmanhood, rather than birth. These behaviors are symptoms of moral, ethical, and physical cleanliness, which many brahmans claim is their privilege. This author inverts that supposition by demonstrating that since brahmans behave in these ways, then all those (i.e. Vaiṣṇavas) who follow this social code are brahmans.

At the same time the author of the AP is clearly formulating an attack on Muslims as he catalogues their offenses. Īśāna most often uses the term *mleccha* for "Muslim," though he sometimes uses the word *pāṣaṇḍi*, a word often reserved for Buddhists because of its connotation of "atheist," though the word can also denote someone heretical or extremely evil. Sometimes Haridāsa refers to himself as *nīcajāti*, "of low caste," and *aspṛśya pāmara*, "vile untouchable." The word *Muslim* does not appear until the eighteenth century, and so we would not expect to find so explicit a term in the AP. In any case, Haridāsa has distanced himself from his origins and joins in the attack, making it clear that he is indeed not one of them.

Īśāna consistently draws a very clear line between Vaiṣṇava and Muslim, perhaps more clear than we can reasonably expect of a sixteenth-century author. Such a distinction strongly suggests an authorial interest in demonstrating a history of a communcal purity that may never have actually existed. The agenda seems remarkably modern.

Finally Haridāsa complains that local Muslims are breaking Vaiṣṇava images, burning their scriptures, and desecrating the temples. In the face of such unrighteousness, he asks indignantly, why has Kṛṣṇa not fulfilled his promise to appear?

Advaita reminds him that they are living in the Kali Yuga, when all things have degenerated. But his friend's agitation reminds him of his own his firm promise, and Advaita decides that now is the time to devote himself fully and exclusively to bring in Kṛṣṇa to save the world. This nicely launches the story into the next chapter, with the story of the birth of Caitanya.

Īśāna Nāgara, much more explicitly than other Vaiṣṇava authors, attributes Caitanya's advent to Advaita. For Īśāna this is no mere statement to highlight Advaita's constant storming of heaven—something of which anyone would have been capable—but rather a lengthy series of illustrations of Advaita's own divinity and his spiritual paternity of the incarnation for the age.

Chapter 10 opens with Advaita performing his usual morning worship in the Gaṅgā, wondering aloud, as he so frequently did, when the Lord would come to earth to restore righteousness to the people. One of the flowers he has offered to Kṛṣṇa suddenly begins to float upstream, and, immediately recognizing this anomaly as Kṛṣṇa's work, Advaita follows it for fifteen or so miles, all the way to Navadvīpa, where a young pregnant woman, Śacī Miśra, is bathing. Two hard-held folk beliefs enter the narrative at this point: first, that it is inauspicious for offering remnants to adhere to a person's body and, two, that no mortal fetus can withstand the homage of a brahman.

Advaita recognizes this woman as the future mother of the embodiment of Viṣṇu for the Kali Age and, hoping that her very visible pregnancy is that embodiment, bows before her. She miscarries instantly.

This procedure of flowers floating upstream and bowing to the pregnant mother is repeated a number of times, until Śacī has lost many babies. She begins to despair of ever producing a living child to continue her husband's lineage and to care for the couple in their old age and after. Desperate, the couple approach Advaita asking him to cease and desist from all this bowing. He ignores their entreaties (because to his mind he is only hastening the advent of the incarnation of the age) but promises them that they will not only have a son but a most remarkable son.

The next time his offerings begin to float upstream, Advaita knows Śacī is pregnant and that his long-awaited savior is on his way. Once again he bows to her, but this time she retains the child in her womb, so we know she is carrying no mere mortal. And indeed first Viśvarūpa is born, who is never heard from in the narrative again, and then, from a subsequent pregnancy, Viśvambhara, who will later be known as Kṛṣṇa Caitanya.

If the image of the flower floating upstream against the current and adhering to Śacī's body is not sufficiently semenlike to carry the message that it is Advaita who is truly responsible for Caitanya's birth, Īśāna continues to highlight this connection as the advent story unfolds.[40] Advaita and Sītā live in Shantipur, about fifteen miles downstream from Navadvīpa.[41] Advaita senses Viśvambhara's arrival and quickly travels to the Miśra home. Śacī is in seclusion in the childbirth hut, as is traditional, where she will remain with the baby for forty days. Only the midwife and immediate family members are permitted to enter the hut during this important time of family bonding. Yet Advaita, who is not related to either Śacī or Jagannātha, unhesitatingly enters to see the infant. Śacī, understandably upset, given her childbearing history, tells him that the child will not nurse. Advaita asks her to step aside while he investigates the matter and takes the baby in his arms—something again only the parents are permitted to do in these early days of a child's life. The baby speaks to Advaita, telling him that the problem is simply that his mother has not been properly initiated with the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. Until that initiation takes place, he cannot drink her milk.

Advaita returns the baby to his mother, now sitting outdoors at the base of a neem tree, and initiates her with the proper mantra. He puts the child in her arms the way a midwife puts a newborn into its mother's arms, thus further signaling his delivery of the incarnation of the age to his human parents.

In none of the other biographies, either in the Advaita or the Caitanya corpus, is this responsibility for Caitanya's advent attributed to Advaita so clearly and in such a detailed manner. Īśāna all but tells us Advaita is the father of Caitanya, conferring on him far more importance than the Gauḍīya tradition had previously granted him.

The next chapter begins to outline the membership of Advaita's own branch of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism through his sons. We are given the precise dates of birth of each of them, four years apart, as follows:

1. Acyutānanda, born on the full moon in the month of Vaiśākha,[42] 1492. The astrologer described him as one of the *gopīs* of Vraja, who had become male so she could teach people.
2. Kṛṣṇa Miśra, born on the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Madhu,[43] 1496. The astrologer decreed that this son was Kartikeya, the general of the gods, born to protect the gods on earth.
3. Gopāladāsa, born on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Kārtika,[44] 1500. The astrologer proclaimed that this third son, noted throughout his childhood for his tremendous devotion, was Ganeśa.

Īśāna continues to describe Advaita's family in chapter 15:

4. Balarāma, born in the month of Pauśa[45] in 1504, was proclaimed to be Kubera reborn, a handsome and wise scholar.
5. Svarūpa and
6. Jagadīśa, twins, born in the month of Jyaiṣṭha, in 1508.[46] The astrologer proclaimed that the twins would both have beautiful voices and would behave like Lava and Kuśa, the children of Sītā and Rāma.

In chapter 12 Gaurāṅga and his close friend Gadādhara come to join Advaita's school. Advaita is of course delighted to have them and seats them for some conversation. He asks Gaurāṅga where he has been and what he had been doing thus far. The boy simply gives a direct answer: the two have come from Nadīyā to study. But Gadādhara realizes that while his companion will not detail his own accomplishments, he is not averse to Gadādhara's telling the story and so begins to recite the litany. Gaura began his studies with Gaṅgādāsa, a noted scholar, and mastered grammar in only two years. After that he studied literature and rhetoric for two years and then moved on to the tutelage of Viṣṇu Miśra to study astrology, which took another two years. He spent the next two years with the scholar Sudarśana studying the six philosophical systems and now is presenting himself to Advaita to learn the Vedas.

Caitanya and Gadādhara came to Advaita to study only after they had worked with several other accomplished scholars. Advaita was Caitanya's last formal teacher and therefore the best of all of them, since he put the finishing touches on Caitanya's education. And from all indications, Caitanya's education, too, was quite traditional, including that final portion he received from Advaita.

Advaita's five-year-old son Kṛṣṇa Dāsa (also called Kṛṣṇa Miśra) enters the discussion, along with another student. The little boy tells the group that the key to everything is to acquire the eyes of devotion. His sophisticated utterance delights Gaura, who picks the child up and begins to dance with joy.

The reference to Kṛṣṇa Miśra's age here allows us to calculate Caitanya's age at this point. Kṛṣṇa Miśra, born in 1496, is now five, so the year is 1501. Caitanya was born in 1486, so he is now fifteen years old. This means that Caitanya began his formal studies at the age of seven. He would no doubt have learned to read and write much earlier than that.

Īśāna tells another interesting story from Kṛṣṇa Miśra's childhood. Sītā, who loves Gaura as if he were her own son, had been saving some of his favorite bananas[47] as a treat for Gaura. One morning, while everyone else was out, she went down to the Gaṅgā to bathe. Meanwhile her own son came in from playing, very hungry. He found the bananas, but knew he should not eat them because his mother had been saving them for Gaura. He decided that if he first ritually offered them to Gaura,[48] he would be in effect eating Caitanya's leftovers and so his eating them would be no problem. He did so, with solemn ceremony, and then ate the fruit with great relish.

When his mother came home she noticed the bananas were gone and assumed that one of her own sons had eaten them. First she asked Acyuta, who reminded her that he had already made such a mistake, once drinking some milk intended for Gaura, and her scolding at that time taught him a lesson. Lest we have not heard that story, Īśāna fills us in: Acyuta did indeed drink some milk intended for Caitanya, and his mother slapped him when she found out. The bruise appeared not on Acyuta's body, but on Gaura's!

Finally Sītā asked Kṛṣṇa Miśra about the fate of the bananas, and he acknowledged having eaten them, but said he had done nothing wrong since he had first offered them to Gaura. His mother angrily began to chase him with a stick. The boy ran for refuge to his father, who insisted on hearing the boy's side of the story. His father asked which mantra the boy had used in making his offering, and he replied that he had said "Om. Salutations to Gaura." His father corrected him, saying that he should have said "to Kṛṣṇa" rather than "to Gaura." And the child retorted that Kṛṣṇa's name is included in Gaura's name. Advaita was very impressed with the small boy's wisdom and embraced him. And Sītā then called everyone for dinner.

Gaura announced that he had already eaten and was not hungry. When questioned, he said he had eaten some bananas in his sleep and then let out a banana-smelling belch, much to everyone's amazement. And both parents marveled at the devotion of their small son.

The rest of the chapter discusses Gaura's and Gadādhara's studies and the arrival of Lokanātha Cakravarttī, son of Padmanābha Cakravarttī, to the school.

All three boys were excellent students, full of devotion. And eventually all three complete their studies and depart.

Śacī, back in Navadvīpa, has been missing her son tremendously and is overjoyed to have him back home with her. Gaura and his friends worship Kṛṣṇa in the mornings and then Gaura preaches in the afternoons, wandering around town and outsmarting any scholars who wish to debate with him. He eventually earns quite a reputation and marries a very beautiful girl from Navadvīpa, Lakṣmī, daughter of Vallabhācārya. We learn nothing about how Gaura's marriage was arranged.

The late Professor Ahmad Sharif of the Bengali Department at Dhaka University, who kindly read through this entire text with me and answered many of my questions, told me a story I have seen substantiated nowhere. He said that Caitanya's marriage to Lakṣmī was a "love match," that is, the young people had somehow met and fallen in love and married, with no family involvement whatsoever. This would have been scandalous, and his mother would not have been pleased. However, none of the Gauḍīya texts even so much as hint at such an interpretation of Caitanya's marriage to Lakṣmī; I will return to this problem below.

During this time Gaura founded a Sanskrit school and took on students, including Advaita's eldest son Acyutānanda, who became a most astute scholar.

Chapter 13 begins with a visit from Īśvara Purī, a disciple of Mādhavendra Purī. Īśāna tells us that Īśvara had visited before and that, as soon as he met Advaita, he realized this man would be the cause of Kṛṣṇa's arrival in Nadīyā. Advaita is very pleased to see Īśvara again, and the two become lost in ecstasy as they discuss Kṛṣṇa. After a few days Īśvara sets off for Navadvīpa, where he happens to meet Gaura. He recognizes the young man immediately as Svayaṁ Bhagavān, and Gaura, too, realizes that he is meeting an unusually pious man. They spend several days together, but Īśvara, realizing he has come too early for Gaura's revelation of himself as the joint incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa together, leaves on pilgrimage.

Shortly thereafter Gaura announces he is going to take a few friends and travel to the east to raise money. His first stop is the home of his friend Lokanātha, and Lokanātha's father Padmanābha Cakravarttī greets them all warmly. Padmanābha recognizes Gaura as Kṛṣṇa himself and seats him on a raised dais. As word gets out that a great scholar has arrived, people come from far and wide to see this amazingly attractive man, accompanied by all his students. His preaching attracts many converts, and he outsmarts all intellectual challengers.

The trip is a rousing financial success, with a great deal of money raised, but while he is away his wife Lakṣmī dies, from the snakebite, Īśāna says, of the loneliness of missing her husband. If Ahmad Sharif's story has any substance, one must interpret this "snakebite of loneliness" even more metaphorically. Profes-

sor Sharif's comments, however, do provide an example of hagiography as a living process. To his mind, the absence of textual material on Caitanya's marriage with Lakṣmī signaled something problematic about the match. One very possible explanation would be that the couple had defied tradition and bypassed their elders in choosing to marry. While such a situation arises with increasingly frequency in modern Bangladesh, it would have been extremely anomalous among the brahmans of Caitanya's day. And since none of the Gauḍīya hagiographers offers this interpretation, it is extremely unlikely to be accurate. But this is exactly the sort of explanation that begins in the mind of an inquiring person to explain an unusual situation. Once the explanation begins to circulate, it takes on a life of its own and becomes rumor, and then it can easily progress to the status of an assumption, and may eventually become committed to writing, at which time it finally gains the weight of evidence.[49]

This news of course upsets Gaura tremendously, so his close friends arrange another marriage as soon as possible. They find the bride, a lovely and virtuous girl named Viṣṇupriyā, at the home of the great scholar Sanātana Miśra.

In the next chapter we learn of the death of Caitanya's father Jagannātha, and Gaura's trip to Gayā to conduct the funeral rites. At the Viṣṇupada Temple in Gayā he again meets Īśvara Purī and prostrates himself before the great renunciate. The two stay up all night discussing Kṛṣṇa, and finally Gaura asks Īśvara to give him mantra initiation.

When Gaura returns to Navadvīpa everyone notices that he is now wearing a *tūlasī* necklace and has written the name of Hari all over his body.[50] They begin to tease him, but Gaura replies that dressing like a proper Vaiṣṇava is in fact crucial to worship. Gaura's new awakening in devotion brings still more students to study with him, but he is already losing his taste for erudition as his sights move elsewhere.

This chapter is pivotal to the AP narrative. With Caitanya's awakening to his true calling as a preacher of emotional devotionalism, Advaita's own mission has come to fruition. He has succeeded in bringing in the incarnation for the age, and that incarnation is now embarked upon his sacred duty, to rescue the world from ignorance of Kṛṣṇa.

In this same chapter Īśāna introduces Nityānanda, born in the village of Ekacaka in Rāḍha (western Bengal) to Hāḍāī Paṇḍita and his wife Padmāvatī, on the thirteenth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Māgha, in 1473. Nityānanda had been Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Balarāma and was born in Bengal to spread divine love. He became a renunciate at a very early age, roaming from pilgrimage place to pilgrimage place, and finally made his way to Nandana Ācārya's house in Navadvīpa. Gaurāṅga sensed his presence and alerted all his devotees to the arrival of a great man, and they all went out to find him.

Nityānanda presented a remarkable figure: he was physically huge and very handsome, with sectarian marks on his forehead and a *tūlasī* necklace around his neck. Īśāna describes their meeting as "the light of the sun-Gaura" falling on the "moon-Nityānanda," a meeting of true luminaries. Nityānanda recognizes Gaura as Svayaṁ Bhagavān, and then Gaura reveals Nityānanda's identity as well. From then on the two were often together, chanting the name of God daily.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the river in Shantipur, Advaita notices that he has not seen Gaura recently and plots a way to bring him across to his place. He develops a clever interpretation of the *Yoga Vaśiṣṭha* and explains to his students that scholarship is greater than devotion, waiting to see how Gaura will react when he learns of this philosophical switch.

Gaura and Nityānanda race to Shantipur. Īśāna reports that, when the two arrive, Advaita is "refuting devotion like the ocean of milk disgorging poison," a reference to the primeval churning of the cosmic ocean at the time of creation. In that myth a deadly poison shot forth from the churning, and Śiva swallowed that poison to save humanity. But here Śiva—Advaita—is vomiting that poison back into the world.

Gaura trembles with rage to see this, and knocks the older man from his seat. Advaita faints, the students wail, and Sītā weeps at the sight. When Advaita regains his senses, Gaura asks him what he has been doing. Advaita only replies with a request to see Kṛṣṇa in a two-armed form, holding a flute, wearing a peacock feather. When his wish is granted, he again faints.

Upon awakening he announces that he has been mistaken and promises that, from then on, with Gaura's permission he will preach devotion. He then brings out his two devotional commentaries, one each on the *Yoga Vaśiṣṭha* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Gaurāṅga loves them both, and Nityānanda praises them, too.

Afterward, everyone begins chanting the name of Hari, and all can see that the three men are the same, only their bodies are different. One is the form of the devotee, one is the nature of the devotee, and one is the embodiment of the devotee, as Īśāna tells us.[51]

Meanwhile Sītā has been in the kitchen cooking a feast, which she sets before the image of Madana Gopāla before serving it to the men. Gaura sits in the center, with Nityānanda on his right and Advaita on his left, and the other disciples in a circle around them. The seating arrangement reflects the standard iconography. Whenever these three are shown together, Advaita is on Caitanya's left, but for us as viewers he is on the right, the ritually clean side. That of course puts Nityānanda on the left, the unclean, polluted side.

Īśāna has dealt with two problematic bits of sectarian history in this chapter. First, with the account of Advaita's preaching scholarship as a ruse, he deals with the troublesome issue of the master's name. How can the "Master of Nondual-

ism" serve as the herald of this new age of frankly dualistic devotionalism? This is not the first point in the text where the author tries to come to terms with the problem. Here he shows that Advaita Ācārya did indeed once preach nondualism but quickly realized the error of his ways. And we, the readers, know that the whole episode was merely a ploy for Caitanya's attention and that Advaita really knew better all the time. The more sophisticated readers, however, understand this section to constitute, first, an acknowledgment that Advaita did once preach monism and, second, the neutralizing of that bit of history by the scholar's own public and dramatic renunciation of that philosophy.

The second problem is that of Nityānanda,[52] whose followers very quickly outnumbered those of the other early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava leaders. We find hints, in varying degrees of subtlety, throughout Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature, of an ongoing dispute between Nityānanda and Advaita, and we have every indication that their styles were very different. Dimock suggests that issues of caste may be behind the apparent feud[53] and places Nityānanda's group in an opposing philosophical camp (the tāntric side) from Advaita's group (the orthodox, in every sense). Yet in this very conciliatory chapter of the AP Īśāna shows only a harmonious meeting and affirms the spiritual interchangeability of the triumvirate of Caitanya, Advaita, and Nityānanda.

Chapter 15 concludes the list of Advaita's sons and begins discussion of Gaurāṅga's renunciation and its impact on his hometown family and friends. A devotee arrives from Nadīyā with the news that Gaura has had his head shaved and has formally taken renunciate's vows from Keśava Bhārati and is now known as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. His mother is beside herself with grief, and his wife Viṣṇupriyā's distress is beyond description. Not only will both women now be bereft of his companionship and support, but since he is the only surviving son, and childless, his renunciation ensures the death of the lineage.

Advaita and Sītā respond similarly, but eventually Advaita realizes that the renunciation is simply another ploy Caitanya is using for instructional purposes. He does not take the news very seriously and sets out to bring him home.

When Advaita finds Caitanya, it is clear to him that the younger man believes himself to be in Vṛndāvana. Caitanya expresses his amazement that Advaita has traveled so far to see him. Advaita cleverly replies that scriptures say that wherever Caitanya/Kṛṣṇa is, is Vraja, and he and Nityānanda bundle him into their boat and take him to Shantipur. Sītā wails at the sight of him as a renunciate but runs immediately to the kitchen to begin preparing a feast. She seats Gaura and Nityānanda for the feast and begins serving them, but Gaura says that no ritual can succeed without Śiva and refuses to eat until Advaita sits down with them. Nityānanda chimes in much less politely, telling Gaura not to honor "this gluttonous dwarf" whose belly can never be filled, even if he eats with all four hands.

Advaita's reply includes the remark to Nityānanda that "even though there is only one of you, you eat with countless mouths."[54] The dinner continues with a great deal of bantering among the three, all apparently designed to reveal each other's true divine natures.

Both men are staking out their theological territory, and each other's, at the same time. Nityānanda is teasing Advaita about his physical appearance[55] while giving us yet another divine identity for his friend, and Advaita, in using the standard equation of Nityānanda as Ananta, is perhaps kinder than Nityānanda was to him, for Advaita is saying that Nityānanda is the support of the entire movement.

Throughout this episode the author puts seemingly mean-spirited words in Nityānanda's mouth and conciliation in Advaita's. For Īśāna, any friction between these two camps was Nityānanda's doing. In spite of his awareness of Advaita's true identity, he continued to poke fun and behave disrespectfully with the elderly gentleman. In return, Advaita shows his self-appointed rival only kindness.

Caitanya's mother learns that her son is with Advaita, so she crosses the river to see him. His renunciation breaks her heart, but she too turns to the kitchen and prepares a few of his favorite dishes.

The three men stay together there in Shantipur for some time, with Gaura giving sermons during the day, and the group chanting the Name at night. One day Gaurāṅga asks his mother's permission to leave. She fears he will go all the way to distant Vṛndāvana, where she will never be able to see him, and so asks him to stay in Nadīyā. But as a renunciate, he reminds her, he can not live so close to home. The compromise solution is for him to go to Puri, from which town communication would be relatively easy. He explains that he had to become a renunciate to spread dharma and that this should not be a cause of sorrow for anyone.

He sets out with a few companions for Puri, and with every Kṛṣṇa image they encounter en route Caitanya's devotional frenzy increases. Finally, when he collapses in front of the Jagannātha images in Puri, he does not regain consciousness as quickly as usual. Sarvabhauma Bhaṭṭācārya sees this, recognizes the symptoms of excessive divine love, and has him carried to his own house nearby. The group spends several days with Sarvabhauma, who under Gaura's influence leaves his intellectual ways to become a great Vaiṣṇava, lost in divine love.

From Puri Caitanya travels to the pilgrimage sites in south India. He meets Rāmānanda Rāya, a great scholar of the devotional scriptures. And from the south he returns to Puri, becoming lost in love again at the sight of Jagannātha.

Many of the Bengali devotees would travel to Puri every year to see Caitanya at the time of the great chariot festival. The first time Advaita went, his son Kṛṣṇa Miśra begged to be allowed to go along. His father told him the trip would be too difficult for him at such a tender age. Sītā, realizing how disappointed her son was, told him to just stay home and worship Kṛṣṇa, and try to behave like

his older brother Acyuta. She then took Kṛṣṇa Miśra and his wife Vijayā to the riverbank and initiated them with her *siddha* mantra. Īśāna unambiguously tells us that Sītā is conferring mantra initiation on her son Kṛṣṇa Miśra and his wife, even while her husband still lived. The implication is that Sītā had her husband's confidence, as well as his permission, to initiate their son and daughter-in-law.

Meanwhile, in Puri, all the Gauḍīyas enjoy a wonderful reunion, dancing and singing in procession, with Advaita leading, Caitanya in the center and Nityānanda at the rear. Later in that same chapter we find Advaita taking over the Ananta role, when he and Caitanya reenact Kṛṣṇa's water play in the river. Advaita begins to float in the river and places Caitanya on his chest so that the two look like Mahāviṣṇu reclining on his serpent-bed Ananta. This is a striking assertion, in light of the long-standing feud between Advaita and Nityānanda (or at least among their respective followers). At the beginning of the chapter Advaita recognized Nityānanda's role as the *dhāman*, the site for the entire descent of the eternal Vraja, but here he has usurped it. Whatever the disagreement between the two may have been, it is never mentioned directly but only alluded to. Here Nityānanda is not even in the picture when his usual role is discussed.

In chapter 16 we find Caitanya returning briefly to Shantipur, after his disciples have dissuaded him from traveling to Vṛndāvana. The Gauḍīyas are delighted to see him and celebrate with several days of chanting, dancing, and feasting on food offered to Kṛṣṇa, all at Advaita's house. Finally Caitanya does manage to leave for Vṛndāvana, visiting many pilgrimage sites en route and converting many people he meets.

As soon as he touches the soil of Vraja he becomes lost in the mood of Kṛṣṇa's amorous companions, the cowherd girls, searching desperately for Kṛṣṇa.

Meanwhile, back in Bengal, the young Acyutānanda misses Caitanya terribly. Caitanya realizes this, and magically draws the boy to him like a magnet, in an instant. Acyuta begins to scold his friend for leaving the Vraja of devotion (i.e., Nadīyā) and traveling to the Vraja of the cowherd girls, because the latter Vraja is now empty, as everyone has been born in Bengal for Caitanya's sake.

Hearing that, Caitanya reveals his true form as a joint embodiment of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, overwhelming Acyuta entirely. Acyuta apologizes for having said Vraja is empty, explaining that he was simply suffering from having been apart from Caitanya. The assertion of the dual incarnation does not appear in the Caitanya corpus until the later hagiographies. We have already seen that Īśāna attributes this doctrine to Advaita Ācārya and Mādhavendra Purī, and in this chapter he reminds us of that attribution.

Caitanya then starts to look for Rādhā's Pond and realizes that Acyuta's devotion is so pure that he will be able to see the now lost locations of Kṛṣṇa's activi-

ties more readily than anyone else. And, indeed, Acyuta takes him to the pond. Caitanya dives into the water and swims over to the adjoining Śyāma's Pond. As he comes out of the water he smears his body with the mud that has been in contact with Kṛṣṇa's body and prostrates himself a hundred times, singing the praises of the two ponds. And, finally, he faints.

Acyuta becomes distraught at this, and begins crying out "Hari!" After six hours Gaura regains consciousness and begins to praise Acyuta for his discovery of the ponds. After some discussion, Caitanya once again reveals his true joint nature. Caitanya behaves in the same way at each site in Vraja.

These events in Vraja reveal the contemporary concern of Caitanya and many other Vaiṣṇavas to rediscover the then hidden sites of Kṛṣṇa's childhood and adolescent activities and to stake their claims to the sites. Rādhā's Pond, for example, would become one of the main Gauḍīya centers in Vraja.[56]

From there, we read in chapter 17, Caitanya continues on his pilgrimage. In Prayāga (Allahabad) he meets Rūpa Gosvāmī and his brother Anupama, much to everyone's delight. As Caitanya begins to embrace the brothers, they remind him that they are untouchables. Gaura reminds them that any devotee of Kṛṣṇa is like a brahman, praises them for their devotion, and asks after their brother Sanātana.

Rūpa replies that Sanātana has been imprisoned and begs Caitanya to free him. Gaura replies that no devotee of Kṛṣṇa can truly be bound, and tells the brothers they will see their kinsman very soon. He sends the two of them to Vṛndāvana to spread devotion, compose devotional scriptures, and recover more of the lost holy sites.

On the way back home, when they stop in Kāśī, Acyuta meets a naked renunciate one morning while bathing at the Gaṅgā. The renunciate hears Acyuta calling out Caitanya's name and speaks to him, questioning his attribution of divinity to Caitanya. The man has heard of many of Caitanya's exploits and considers Caitanya's association with Muslims and others of low status to be depraved behavior.

Acyuta explains that Gaura is indeed divine and bears the thirty-two marks of Īśvara to prove it, if one looks with the eyes of devotion. But the renunciate can not accept the idea of Parabrahmā with form. The two debate for quite a while, until finally the renunciate is convinced of the truth of Acyuta's words and begs to be taken to meet Caitanya. Acyuta tears his garment in half and gives him a portion so that he will not have to approach Gaurāṅga naked.

As the two approach Caitanya, the renunciate sees Caitanya's universal form immediately and his eyes begin to flow with a steady stream of tears. Gaura infuses him with *śakti*, and divine love rises in him; he begins to sing and dance.

Chapter 18 opens with Sītā bemoaning not having seen Caitanya in a very long time. Just then she and her husband learn that a group is preparing to set out for Puri to visit Caitanya, and they join the group. Sītā prepares and packs all Caitanya's favorite dishes to take along. Their third son, Gopāla Dāsa, also goes along.

The usual devotional ecstasy ensues following the reunion of all the Gauḍīyas. Even young Gopāla dances and sings. But the boy suddenly faints, and no one can revive him. Advaita fears his son has died. Finally Caitanya begins crying out, "Get up, Gopāla!" And very quickly the child arises, crying "Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya!"

Later on that same trip south Sītā becomes upset because she can never make Caitanya eat as much as she wants to feed him. Whenever he comes to eat with Sītā and Advaita, he brings a lot of renunciates along, and gives all his food to them and never spends time alone with the elderly couple.

At that point the sky darkens and a terrible hailstorm blows in. No one dares go outside. But at the height of the storm Gaurāṅga himself arrives on their doorstep, alone. The elderly couple are delighted, invite him in, and feed him to their hearts' content.

Before they sit down to eat, Īśāna (the author of the text, inserting himself into the narrative) starts to wash Caitanya's feet. Caitanya stops him, because Īśāna is a brahman and therefore not subservient to him. This upsets the boy terribly, and so he rips off his sacred thread in hopes of becoming sufficiently base to serve Caitanya.

Caitanya laughs to see this and gives him another thread. The child begins to explain himself and bursts into tears. Advaita reprimands Caitanya for making a disciple suffer like this, and then finally the boy is allowed to wash Caitanya's feet.

Īśāna uses this passage to remind his readers why they should trust him: he worked as a servant in Advaita's own house and so is a very reliable witness to what transpired there.

In chapter 19 Rūpa and Sanātana travel to Puri to see Gaurāṅga and continue to be amazed at his willingness to have contact with untouchables. We see Rūpa presenting his first play before Caitanya, who suggests that he divide it into two separate plays, to be entitled, as they now are, *Vidagdha Mādhava* and *Lalita Mādhava*.

Caitanya explains his own *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* commentary[57] to Acyuta, who finds it the best he has ever heard. But Caitanya, who does not want to embarrass other commentators, asks Acyuta to say nothing about it. We learn that this is not the first time Gaura has chosen to keep his own work hidden. Many years previously he had composed a commentary on the classical logic scriptures, but a chance encounter while crossing the river one day with another brahman, who had written on the same text, led him to throw his own work into the river so as not to destroy the other man's reputation.

This chapter treats Caitanya more than any of his disciples. Toward the end of the chapter, which takes place after the chariot procession in Puri, Caitanya calls all his followers together and asks them not to keep coming to Puri. He directs them all to stay home and disseminate the Name. He orders Nityānanda to get married, and then all the Gauḍīyas depart for home.

Haridāsa stays in Puri, where he soon dies. He collapses one day while singing Kṛṣṇa's name. He places Caitanya's foot on his chest, and dies crying out, "Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya!"

Chapter 20 deals with Nityānanda's marriage to Vasudhā and Jāhnavī, daughters of Sūryadāsa Paṇḍita of the town of Ambika. Sūryadāsa does not want to marry his daughters to this wild man.

Some time later Nityānanda and Uddhāraṇa are sitting on the riverbank, when Sūryadāsa appears, carrying the body of his daughter Vasudhā. The family starts making preparations to cremate her, when Nityānanda asks Sūryadāsa to give her to him if he can revive her. Nityānanda whispers the Name in her ear, and she arises. After this Sūryadāsa understands who Nityānanda is, and consents to marry his daughters to him. Nityānanda and his wives settle in the village of Khaḍaha, where he establishes the worship of Śyāmasundara, another form of Kṛṣṇa.

Advaita all this time has been suffering from the separation from Gaurāṅga and prays to be able to see him once again. He decides once more to try the ploy of teaching scholarship over devotion, to see if it will again bring Caitanya to him. And so he assembles all his students and gives them a lecture on monism, with many more in the days that follow. His students accept their guru's words, but the other Vaiṣṇavas weep to see this.

Caitanya, being omniscient, quickly learns what Advaita has been preaching, and rushes up from Puri. He announces that since Advaita heralded Caitanya into this world, the elder man was actually greater than he. Īśāna puts this statement in Caitanya's mouth so neither Advaita himself nor any member of his family makes a claim that would have been nearly blasphemous. Coming from Caitanya, it must be true that Advaita is greater. Caitanya chides Advaita, telling him that he should have considered the distress of the people he is misleading with this contrary preaching. Caitanya promises to appear before Advaita whenever he thinks of him and commands him to speak no more of monism.

That evening, Advaita calls his students together and explains that he has now recanted his previous teachings and realizes that nothing can be greater than devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Once again his students accept his words, except for three, who have had enough of their guru's philosophical vacillation and have now set their minds on monism. Kāmadeva Nāgara is among these three, but

the other two are not named. Advaita tries to convince them to return to their previous devotional practices, but they refuse, and so he renounces them, and they all leave the region. Īśāna does not tell us what becomes of these monistic Vaiṣṇavas.

This concern is echoed in frequent passages in the text where key actors debate the path of knowledge versus the path of devotion. It is very likely then that Advaita was indeed originally trained as the master of nondualism his name connotes. In fact, the last philosophical movement to sweep South Asia with similar force was Śaṅkara's monism, and many subsequent schools of thought built on what Śaṅkara had begun. We do know that Advaita had received the traditional brahmanical education, which would have included instruction in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, the various grammatical and astrological treatises, and material from the six classical schools of philosophy. Advaita had set up his own traditional school for brahman boys in Navadvīpa so as to be near at hand when Kṛṣṇa did finally arrive, and we must only presume that he provided his students with the standard classical curriculum.

Chapter 21 treats the death, or "disappearance," of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya. Toward the end of his life Caitanya adopted more and more of the behavior of Rādhā, pining away for love of the absent Kṛṣṇa. And one day, according to Locana Dāsa's *Caitanya Maṅgala* (4.15.15–39), Caitanya simply disappeared, apparently by merging into the Jagannātha image at the great temple in Puri. Īśāna follows Locana Dāsa's account of Caitanya's disappearance. The word *disappearance* is key here. Like Locana Dāsa, Īśāna does not say that Caitanya died. The authors of the most popular of the Caitanya hagiographies, the *Caitanya Bhāgavata* and the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, do not discuss Caitanya's death at all; for these authors the "death" is insignificant, for Kṛṣṇa has simply changed the locus of his activities,[58] moving from the manifest Vraja back into the unmanifest.

Meanwhile, back in Shantipur, Advaita instantly realizes what has happened and falls into a state of divine madness, crying out Caitanya's nickname of "Nimāñī!" over and over again. Sometime later, when he is officially informed of Caitanya's disappearance, he faints from grief, as does the rest of his family. From then on Advaita meditates ceaselessly on the form of Gaurāṅga. Caitanya comes to him in a dream, promising to reappear as the son of Kṛṣṇa Miśra, out of love for the older man. And he also promises that Nityānanda will appear as Kṛṣṇa Miśra's second son.

And the very next day, that first grandson is born, the very image of Gaurāṅga. The infant fills with tears whenever he hears about Gaura. The family names him Raghunātha. The second grandson, the image of Nityānanda, is born on *dola-purṇīmā*[59] and is named Dola Govinda.

Shortly after the births of these grandsons, Advaita calls all six of his sons together to give them his final words of advice.[60] He asks them all to remember their obligations as householders and admonishes them not to covet anyone else's property or wife, to praise holy men, and to install *tūlasī*[61] trees in the courtyards of their houses. He instructs them further to engage in daily singing of the name of Hari and not to do anything solely for their own pleasure. They are to live their lives with the goal of serving Kṛṣṇa and, in this way, will accrue neither sin nor merit for their behavior and so will break their karmic bonds.

The three eldest sons, Acyuta, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, and Gopāladāsa, are all devoted to Kṛṣṇa. Advaita speaks to them individually, beginning with Acyuta. He tells him that since he (Acyuta) had rejected marriage and has always been indifferent to the material world, he will not take him away from that worship and service. Kṛṣṇa Miśra, the second son, is also a great Vaiṣṇava and has taken up householder life. He is thus suited for serving Kṛṣṇa formally in the temple, and now he has two sons to follow in his footsteps. Therefore, Advaita continues, he would like to offer the responsibility for the worship of his very own Madana Gopāla to his second son, and asks Acyuta what he thinks of the idea.

Acyuta, Īśāna tells us, consented to this rather unusual situation, and the third son, Gopāla Dāsa, also agreed to the plan. The fourth and fifth sons, Balarāma and Jagadīśa (and presumably Jagadīśa's twin Svarūpa as well) resented this and set up their own Kṛṣṇa images elsewhere in town. Shantipur today is dotted with Vaiṣṇava temples, several of which are maintained by direct descendants of Advaita Ācārya, all of whom bear the surname Goswāmī. Madana Gopāla Jīū, in Madana Gopāla Pāḍā, is presently tended by Mañjulikā Goswāmī and her son Rañju, whose late father was a direct descendant of Kṛṣṇa Miśra and thus heir to the name and responsibility for Advaita's own image. That original image has since been replaced and is no longer in use for regular worship but carefully kept in storage.

The final chapter of the *Advaita Prakāśa,* not surprisingly, contains the passing of Advaita Ācārya. The chapter begins with a description of the suffering both Nityānanda and Advaita felt after the loss of Caitanya. Nityānanda is in his home town of Khaḍaha and writes to Advaita asking him to visit him there. Advaita sets out immediately, and the two have a joyous reunion, spending an entire week alone together drowned in divine love. On the eighth day they emerge, singing and dancing and meditating on the lotus feet of Gaurāṅga. They are completely unaware of the material world, and in this state Nityānanda slips away without anyone noticing. But Advaita realizes that he is gone from this world.

Nityānanda's disappearance is almost more than his disciples can bear. Advaita makes preparations for a great funeral feast, and all Nityānanda's *mahantas*[62] come from far and wide. Each of the seven Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava schools[63] is represented, and they all dance and play drums and cymbals. Advaita dances with each group. Later Nityānanda's son Vīrabhadra arranges a feast, sets up three special seats, and invites Advaita to dine with him just as he had with his father and Gaurāṅga for so many years. And Vīrabhadra afterwards decrees that this was the proper way to hold a Vaiṣṇava feast, with feeding the three lords first, Caitanya in the center, Nityānanda on Caitanya's right, and Advaita on his left.

Īśāna shows the essential unity of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community despite the various subdivisions that had arisen among them with Advaita's dancing with each group. He also makes another subtle attack on Nityānanda by having his son serve the others.

After the funeral celebrations Advaita takes his group back to Shantipur. He is noticeably depressed, as is the rest of the community, after the loss of two of their leaders. Caitanya's mother and wife have gone into such deep seclusion that no one ever sees more than their feet.

Soon afterward Advaita learns that Nityānanda's son Vīrabhadra is on his way to him, hoping to receive mantra initiation. Advaita refuses, saying he must be initiated by his own people, and sends him back to his mother Jāhnavā. Jāhnavā hears this and sends for a holy man to perform the initiation. This is curious, because back in chapter 15 we saw Sītā confer initiation, and yet Jāhnavā, who on the surface seems to be her social and sectarian equivalent, cannot or perhaps will not. Īśāna thus suggests that Jāhnavā did not routinely bestow mantra (or any other) initiation, and Sītā then remains (at least by implication) the only woman in the movement, at least in its second generation, to do so.[64]

Toward the end of his life Advaita is entranced much of the time, searching for Gaurāṅga. Finally one day he announces his imminent departure, and all the Vaiṣṇavas come to Shantipur. Advaita addresses them all, saying he has one final request: they must disseminate Caitanya's teachings as widely as possible and in the process must abandon anyone who is opposed to that goal. Leaders of each of the seven groups dance before him, chanting the name of Hari.

Īśāna describes Advaita Ācārya's disappearance in much the same way as he, in the previous chapter, and Locana Dāsa, in his *Caitanya Maṅgala*, had described Caitanya's disappearance. The word *death* does not appear in the text. Rather Advaita leaps up and runs into the temple of Madana Gopāla in Shantipur, and the doors slam shut behind him. No one can force the doors to open. When the doors finally do open, of their own accord, Advaita is nowhere to be found. Īśāna assumes he has been absorbed by his beloved Madana Gopāla, than

whom he is no different, *a-dvaita*. His son Acyuta is the first to realize that his father has left this world and mourns the loss of this last "branch of the wishing-tree of Gaura's love."

Just as Caitanya disappeared in the temple of his beloved Jagannātha in Puri in Locana Dāsa's account in his *Caitanya Maṅgala*, so Advaita has disappeared into his own temple and his own dear Madana Gopāla. In neither case can any trace be found. No body, no clothing, or other artifacts are left behind. Advaita is simply never seen again. He has certainly "disappeared," but why does Īśāna (and Kṛṣṇadāsa) so studiously avoid the word *death?*

This portrayal is a technique the authors use to further emphasize the divinity of their protagonists. Just as God cannot die, so a divine incarnation, one the tradition insists is "no different" from God, must by definition also be deathless. He has, as Stewart describes the situation, merely changed venue.[65]

Īśāna's attitude toward Advaita's death is quite different from Haricaraṇa's. Haricaraṇa ignores it entirely and ends his work with a story of Advaita, Caitanya, and Nityānanda enacting the famous *dāna līlā* story, discussed in chapter 2. This enactment took place while Caitanya was alive, long before Advaita's own death. Haricaraṇa mentions neither the death of Caitanya nor that of his protagonist Advaita and, by ending his story so early in their lives, does not have to contend with the issue at all.

Caitanya's hagiographers are not at all unanimous in their treatments of Caitanya's death, and in fact in none of the works is his death witnessed. Four of the texts are completely silent on the subject, four authors describe Caitanya as disappearing into the image of Jagannātha in the temple in Puri (including Locana Dāsa's text; Īśāna follows Locana's description of this event in his own work), two have him disappear into the image in the Gopīnātha temple, also in Puri, one (Jayānanda, in his *Caitanya Maṅgala*) has him die from an infection festering in a foot wound sustained during the Chariot Festival in Puri, and one author has Caitanya mistake the blue of the sea for Kṛṣṇa and wander out into the water, never to resurface.[66]

None of the writers uses the term *death*, instead speaking in terms of what at first glance appears to be a euphemism ("disappeared") but in fact is to be taken quite literally. And since Advaita, like Caitanya, simply wandered off alone and then disappeared, leaving no remains, we can only assume the author is telling us that his protagonist melted into the image in the temple and returned to his true form in his eternal abode; we are thus to understand both men as divine.

Īśāna now turns to himself, telling us that he has composed AP at the command of his lord Advaita Ācārya. Toward the end of his life Advaita speaks to Īśāna, telling him not to be sad after he is gone and urging him to preach about Gaurāṅga in Advaita's birthplace. After Advaita has died, Sītā gave Īśāna the fur-

ther order to get married. In compliance with these requests, Īśāna traveled east with Jagadānanda Rāya and started a family.

The hagiographical material treating Caitanya indicates that he was first exposed to devotionalism while on pilgrimage following his father's death, when he met Rāmānanda Rāya, and that he then brought that devotionalism back home to Bengal. Advaita's biographers, however, give Advaita credit for bringing devotionalism from the south and introducing it in Bengal through his meeting with Mādhavendra Purī at Madhva's hermitage[67] long before Caitanya is born. Advaita subsequently brings Mādhavendra Purī's teachings—among them most notably a mysterious text called the *Ananta Saṁhitā*—back to Bengal.

Mādhavendra Purī also introduced another important doctrinal innovation, that of *yugala sevā*, worship of the divine couple. Up until the time of Caitanya, worshippers of Kṛṣṇa would worship the single image of Kṛṣṇa himself, usually as either the adorable child or as the mischievous adolescent. Īśāna, however, shows us that Mādhavendra Purī and Advaita Ācārya introduced this type of worship long before Caitanya's birth.

Īśāna Nāgara plays with the notion of joint worship in interesting ways prior to introducing Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa worship specifically. The child in Lābhā's womb who will be born as Kamalākṣa, and will come to be known as Advaita Ācārya, he tells us, is an amalgam, the conjunction of Mahāviṣṇu himself and Sadāśiva. This merger is very clearly not in the *mādhurya* mode that will come later in sectarian history but rather represents the conjunction of the most majestic elements of divinity then imaginable. Further, it constitutes the first appearance on the scene of Kṛṣṇa *līlā*, as Viṣṇu appears to set the stage for the other performers.

As AP progresses we see Advaita move from that *aiśvarya* mode along the continuum of devotion described above, until he finally reaches *mādhurya*, as is foreshadowed in chapter 2 with his childhood encounter with the goddess in the temple in Lāuḍa.

Advaita's joint embodiment of Mahāviṣṇu and Śiva then in turn unearths (literally) the image of Madana Gopāla outside Vraja, and the picture of Kṛṣṇa Viśākhā painted for the distraught Rādhā, suffering from separation from her divine lover Kṛṣṇa. Mādhavendra Purī appears at that point in the narrative to instruct Advaita to return to Shantipur and set up the two images in his own temple and worship them as a unit.

If we step back from the story for a moment, we can see that Īśāna is constructing a framework in which the great gods Mahāviṣṇu and Śiva are themselves worshipping the loving couple Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In other words, that worship of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is superior to the older worship of Śiva and Ma-

hāviṣṇu. Throughout the *Advaita Prakāśa* Īśāna Nāgara has very cleverly embedded such messages, clearly signaling at every step of the way that this new religion introduced by Advaita Ācārya and propagated by Kṛṣṇa Caitanya both subsumes all others and is more worthwhile than its predecessors. By the end of chapter 2 he had already shown that what Advaita has to say is more important than goddess worship and has even made a mighty Śākta king convert to Vaiṣṇavism. Here he takes on Śaivites and *pāñcarātra*[68] worshippers as well; later he will attack the Muslims.

Śāktas were not the only competition with which the Vaiṣṇavas had to contend. Śaivites constituted an equally strong rival presence. Thus the inclusion of Śiva in the theological makeup of Advaita Ācārya constitutes an acknowledgment that Viṣṇu was not at the core of all Bengali religious expression at the time. And because Advaita, representing traditional brahmanical religion in its many forms, is the instrumental cause for the advent of Caitanya, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas can then claim that Caitanya's mode of ecstatic and very personal devotion is the natural development, the next step upward, from the older traditions and that the older ideas are very much a part of the newer form. The Gauḍīyas have easily and neatly absorbed their potential competition, marked that competition as "no different from us," and rehierarchized their theology to produce one seamless whole. All without any overt antagonism.

Īśāna makes it clear that, while he brought an entirely new mode of religion to Bengal, Advaita Ācārya is no social nonconformist. At every stage in his life Advaita behaves appropriately, performing the proper rituals at the right times.

Every act in a person's life is governed by prescribed rites and rituals. Until very recently, and still today in much of rural India, the life cycle was entirely predictable. Everyone married, usually at quite a young age (although marriages were not usually consummated until both parties had reached a suitable age). After the parents' death the eldest son was responsible for carrying out the funeral rites and making sure the proper offerings were made each year in the parents' and other ancestors' honor. Thus we find Advaita Ācārya traveling to the holy city of Gayā, the nearest major center of pilgrimage, to offer the requisite rice balls for his parents shortly after their simultaneous deaths.

As time passes, Advaita has little interest in marriage and has to be reminded of the importance of maintaining his lineage before he will consider setting aside his devotional practices to start a family. He marries quite late in life, but once he has married wastes no time in producing six sons. After their births Advaita arranges for all the usual and indispensable life-cycle rituals for his sons: their naming ceremonies, performed very shortly after birth, the ceremonies at which a child is given its first solid food (usually performed when the child is between six and nine months of age), the ritual at which chalk is first placed in

the child's hand, indicating readiness to begin the education process, usually around age five.

Īśāna's mention of all these events tells us that Advaita Ācārya and his family were responsible members of the community who conformed fully to social and religious expectations. This conformity is a large part of what makes them reliable sources of knowledge for that community and, it follows, for us.

Just as the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* is the final word[69] on the life of Caitanya, so the *Advaita Prakāśa* is technically the final word on the life of Advaita Ācārya. In many respects the latter work is modeled on the former. For example, shortly after the death of his father, Caitanya sets out on pilgrimage. During his travels he is converted to Vaiṣṇavism. And, shortly after the deaths of his parents, Advaita does likewise. But Advaita's pilgrimage (see map, page 163) is not the simple series of visits an average devotee might make, because Advaita is after all Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva in one. He visits sites connected with those two gods and, interestingly, does not visit the various Śākta sites in the same areas. However Advaita is making his perambulation about half a century before Caitanya did, and Īśāna does not have him convert to Vaiṣṇavism en route, but rather has a leading Vaiṣṇava recognize Advaita's already existent deep devotion when he finds him unconscious at Madhva Ācārya's place. Īśāna is telling us that actually Advaita is the one who first brought devotionalism to Bengal, not Caitanya, and that as Caitanya's teacher he was responsible for inculcating the younger man with these new ideas so that he could go on to spread them throughout the countryside.

I would argue, however, that the putative Īśāna, whoever he may be, really intends his AP to be seen as the first, rather than the last, word in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava hagiographies. While Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja seems to have intended his massive work to put the seal on Caitanya's hagiographical corpus, and draws heavily from his predecessors in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, Īśāna Nāgara sets himself up as the very first Bengali-language Gauḍīya hagiographer, and does so even as he produces the "final word" on Advaita Ācārya. The author of the AM makes more claims regarding Advaita's divinity than had any prior writer, but stopped short of claiming the full supremacy we find in the AP.

Īśāna Nāgara, on the other hand, has sanctified Kṛṣṇa Miśra as his father's torchbearer by demonstrating that both his parents were divine. He has shown that Advaita represents the complete range of available devotional styles and divinity, has all but physically fathered the leader of the new variety of Vaiṣṇavism, and is thus Caitanya's superior in every sense.

We move now to material treating Sītā Devī, Advaita Ācārya's primary wife.

7

Sītā Devī: Gateway to the Future

GAUDĪYA VAIṢṆAVA THEOLOGY ENCOURAGES its (male) followers to imagine themselves to be Kṛṣṇa's handmaidens; in their world, Kṛṣṇa is the only male. Yet, interestingly, while one might expect the theology to glorify the actual biological women who, logic would suggest, have been naturally blessed with the correct gender for worship, this is not generally the case. Specific women do appear frequently in the Caitanya biographies, but these women do not play major roles in the formation and development of the new religious community. Caitanya's mother Śacī and his wife Viṣṇupriyā, for example, are consistently portrayed as dutiful women, fulfilling all the expected obligations of their social roles, which are narrowly defined by their relationships to Caitanya. After his renunciation, Caitanya seems to have done his best to avoid contact with women to whom he was not related and, according to the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*,[1] actually banished one devotee from his presence after that devotee had begged some special rice for Caitanya from a woman. And, after his death, Caitanya's mother and his widow both properly retreated into seclusion, never again to be seen in public.

Similarly, in the Advaita Ācārya corpus, certain women receive frequent mention because of their relationships with notable men: Śacī, Viṣṇupriyā, Jāhnavī,[2] primary wife of Nityānanda (one of Caitanya's closest associates), and Sītā Devī. Yet sectarian records mention no women among the leaders of the first generation. However, in the next generation leadership shifted to (among others) two women who were so close to the founders that in retrospect their roles seem obvious, although at the time the community itself could not have anticipated their rises to power. These were Advaita Ācārya's senior wife Sītā Devī and Jāhnavī.

Advaita Ācārya had two wives, Sītā and Śrī. Śrī was not as prominent as Sītā and does not have a literature dedicated to her. Nor do we anywhere find mention of her involvement in Advaita's sectarian responsibilities or more than

token mention of her meditative practices. While the literature agrees that Sītā and Śrī were both married to Advaita Ācārya, Śrī vanishes from record after the birth of Advaita's second son Kṛṣṇa Miśra and is rarely, if ever, mentioned again—further proof of her limited role in the devotional life and leadership of the community.

Sītā, on the other hand, is a major actor in both of her husband's full hagiographies (AM and AP). In both of those works Sītā's remarkable abilities are in evidence only until her marriage. She also appears in other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava works, where every author emphasizes her culinary abilities but has little else to say about her. In the two works dedicated to her, however, she continues to function on supranormal levels even after her marriage. Sītā is also identified with Lakṣmī, and as a goddess is clearly no ordinary housewife. And, later in life, after she is widowed, when she announces to two male would-be disciples that she can only teach other women, she acknowledges her social limitations and her divine power is again contained: it is limited to the female realm.

We know of Sītā Devī mostly through two works describing her teaching career, Lokanātha Dāsa's *Sītā Caritra* and Viṣṇu Dāsa's *Sītā Guṇa Kadamba,* and the two lengthy hagiographical treatments of her husband, Īśāna Nāgara's *Advaita Prakāśa* (AP) and Haricaraṇa Dāsa's *Advaita Maṅgala* (AM). Gauḍīya writers unanimously hail her husband Advaita Ācārya as the instrumental cause for the advent of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, the movement's official founder, and the relationship between those two men makes Sītā, by association (and aside from anything she may have done independently), a very legitimate member of the group. *Except for the fact that she was not a man.* The authors of all of the literature that discusses Sītā in any detail are clearly wrestling with their perceived need to account for a strong leader who did not fit previously established models of leadership and whose authority might therefore be questioned.

In this chapter I will examine the role Sītā Devī played in her husband's school following his death as well as the legacy Advaita Ācārya left to his sons, the reasons for the unusual way he bequeathed that legacy, and the significance of that legacy for the future of Advaita Ācārya's subsect. These last three all pivot around the figure of Sītā Devī.

Advaita Ācārya's hagiographical corpus tells us that he lived a very long time.[3] Reginald Ray observed the remarkable longevity of many Buddhist saints as well, in both Vajrayāna and Mahāyāna schools,[4] and that in fact this is "a widespread pattern within Indian Buddhism."[5] Longevity is an element that is common across religious boundaries in Asian hagiography.

Although Advaita married a rather young woman quite late in his own life, Sītā would have been well beyond her childbearing years when her husband

died. Sometime after her husband's "disappearance" Sītā Devī became a sectarian leader in her own right. Sītā's occupation of such a venerated position in and of itself seems not particularly problematic for the Gauḍīyas. And we can be reasonably certain that Sītā Devī did indeed come to occupy such a position in the community, because mention of her in such a role appears in many Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sources.

What description one finds of Sītā in the Caitanya biographies centers around her culinary skills. Vṛndāvana Dāsa in his *Caitanya Bhāgavata* praises her cooking (although "Advaita's wife" is unnamed), but Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja hardly mentions her in his *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*.[6] Īśāna Nāgara and Haricaraṇa Dāsa describe Sītā's birth, childhood, and marriage and mention her adult activities in passing, only insofar as they conform to the duties of a proper brahman wife. Like the other women mentioned in the stories, Sītā is a dutiful homemaker and wife, and it is her connection with a great man that first renders her noteworthy. She cares for her husband and sons and her husband's students with great affection, as would be expected, but she far exceeds the normal expectations of hospitality and mere wifely duty. For example, she knows the food preferences of each person in her care and honors her charges frequently with elaborate repasts featuring their favorite dishes. She routinely prepares enormous feasts for the devotees and serves the entire assembly herself.

Throughout her married life she seems to have remained in her husband's shadow politically. She performed all the proper wifely duties, raised the couple's six sons, fed the family and frequent large numbers of guests—but never, so far as we know, took any sort of active role in the theological or political activities of the new movement during her husband's lifetime.

We can easily imagine that the many students who regularly frequented Advaita Ācārya's home would have become quite accustomed to seeing Sītā Devī, and would probably have treated her with the respect and deference, and affection, they would show their own mothers. The author of *Advaita Maṅgala* even describes the first feast Advaita Ācārya held after his marriage, to introduce his disciples to his new wife. The texts state that Sītā treated these boys and young men as if they were her own sons. And so it would not have been much of a stretch for these students to take the next leap of faith, once their guru had departed, to align themselves with the person who was closest to that guru in some clearly visible ways: his widow. That is apparently exactly what happened.[7] Her husband's students, her foster-sons, in a sense, shifted her into the position of authority recently vacated by her husband.

What seems to have bothered the Gauḍīyas, more than her assumption of leadership, is the concomitant possibility of her conferring initiation upon male devotees.

Apparently her initiating female students would not raise hackles, and indeed she tells would-be disciples that she can only provide spiritual instruction to other women, a statement that suggests she actually did so.

Whereas both AP and AM describe the juvenile Sītā's mystical abilities, the two texts devoted to Sītā focus on her adult accomplishments and wonders. Their authors do not describe Sītā's birth and parentage and sequential events of her life but instead relate a number of purported anecdotes from Sītā's adult life, a study of which can be helpful in tracing the development of Sītā's image in the eyes of her (and Advaita Ācārya's) followers.

While Haricaraṇa reports nothing out of the ordinary regarding Sītā's birth to Nṛsiṁha and his (unnamed) wife, aside from its being heralded with music and joy, he does not mention the birth of her sister Śrī at all. Apparently Haricaraṇa considers Śrī unimportant for sectarian concerns. According to AM, the girls' mother died early, and thereafter the daughters took care of their father.

Īśāna Nāgara, in contrast, describes Sītā's birth as a supernatural event in chapter 8 of his AP. Īśāna writes that the fragrance of lotuses (sacred to Viṣṇu) drew the pious brahman Nṛsiṁha Bhāḍudi to a marsh, and he decided to pick some of them for use in his worship. As he began to gather the blossoms, Nṛsiṁha noticed one particularly beautiful flower, gleaming like gold and with a hundred petals.[8] A tiny girl the size of his thumb sat in the middle of this lotus, emitting streams of light. Since Mahāviṣṇu's consort Lakṣmī is usually depicted seated or standing in the middle of a lotus blossom, the reader is not surprised to learn that Nṛsiṁha recognized the radiant child as Lakṣmī and decided to take her home with him, lotus and all.[9] Lakṣmī is not only consort to an important god, she is herself the goddess of wealth and hence a deity one hopes will always reside in one's home. This equation of Sītā with Lakṣmī will become even more significant when she marries the very wealthy Advaita Ācārya and by her very nature ensures that his fortunes will continue to prosper.

Meanwhile, Nṛsiṁha's wife had given birth to a lovely daughter whom she had named Śrī.[10] As soon as Nṛsiṁha reached the house, Īśāna writes, he sneaked into the childbirth room where his wife was confined and showed her the baby he had found in the lotus pond. His wife was so charmed by the child that the couple decided to raise the two girls together as sisters.

Since Nṛsiṁha was a *kulīna*,[11] one could imagine that perhaps he had several wives but only actually lived with one of them, perhaps the (unnamed) mother of Śrī. One might further speculate that Sītā may have been the daughter of another wife, born coincidentally with Nṛsiṁha's visit to Sītā's mother. Nṛsiṁha may have been so captivated by the baby that he insisted on taking her home to raise himself; in such a case neither the child's mother nor her cowife and unwitting foster mother would have had any say in the matter.

In time, according to AM, Nṛsiṁha began to be concerned about his daughters' future and sought a suitable groom for them.[12] Meanwhile, Haricaraṇa writes, Advaita's servant Śyāmadāsa was encouraging Advaita Ācārya, despite his advanced years, to marry and start a family. Advaita dismissed the suggestion and continued to devote himself to the practice of austerities, but admitted willingness to consider marriage at some point.

Given the nature of hagiographical accounts, it is no surprise that such spiritually gifted girls as Sītā and Śrī would have equally extraordinary marriages. Haricaraṇa describes events leading to the marriage of Advaita and Sītā as follows:

> That year Nṛsiṁha brought his daughters to Shantipur for the annual goddess festival. The girls bowed as they approached a *tulasī* tree in the temple courtyard. Advaita was nearby, chanting and dancing, his topknot flying in the breeze. Sītā's gaze met Advaita's, and they fell in love instantly. Nṛsiṁha saw the interaction between the pair, and began marriage negotiations with Śyāmadāsa. Nṛsiṁha had some hesitation about giving his daughters to the elderly Advaita, and wanted to discuss the marriage with his relatives first, but Śyāmadāsa convinced Nṛsiṁha to proceed with the betrothal.[13]

Haricaraṇa's description of events leading to the marriage is straightforward, although the falling in love before marriage suggests an unusual pairing, in a culture where marriages continue to be usually arranged by the couple's parents. Compare the above story with the one that follows, as Īśāna describes events leading up to the marriage early in chapter 8 of AP:

> One day Nṛsiṁha and his daughters sailed to the dock where Advaita Ācārya happened to be conducting his morning rituals. Despite the difference in their ages, Sītā fell in love with Advaita Ācārya at first sight, and announced that she would die if she could not marry him. Śrī was similarly impressed with Advaita Ācārya's appearance, and said that any woman would be blessed to have such a man for her husband.

Advaita invited Nṛsiṁha and his daughters to his home, where he revealed his four-armed form. Nṛsiṁha interpreted this theophany as a sign that Advaita was indeed the proper groom for his daughters. As if to confirm Nṛsiṁha's recognition, at that moment Advaita's house was magically transformed into a jeweled palace filled with flowers. Advaita, robed in white silk and covered with gold jewelry, was now seated on a jeweled throne. His body had been anointed with sandal and musk and covered with garlands of white flowers. Servants and courtiers surrounded him.

Śrīnivāsa, another elder of the Vaiṣṇava community, arrived, and proclaimed the greatness of both Advaita and Nṛsiṁha, and of Nṛsiṁha's daughter Sītā, who had been, Śrīnivāsa said, Paurṇamāsī in Vraja. He announced that Sītā and Śrī were a single soul housed in two bodies, the Yogamāyā to Advaita's Īśvara/ Gopeśvara. Advaita agreed immediately to the wedding.

Īśāna here gives us some further theological postulations. His identification of Sītā as Paurṇamāsī and as Yogamāyā are more clear indications that she is mythologically suited, indeed, intended, to be Advaita Ācārya's wife. Paurṇamāsī is the old woman in Vraja who arranges the secret trysts of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa that epitomize the intense and intimately passionate relationship with the divine that the Gauḍīyas advocate. Yogamāyā is the personification of Kṛṣṇa's magical powers, who always precedes him into the world. Both characters are essential to Kṛṣṇa's activities. Thus Sītā is the perfect mate for the man who will eventually invoke Kṛṣṇa to take birth in Nadīyā. Īśāna also has Advaita deliberately reveal (with the unmistakable imagery of him in his four-armed form, sitting on a jeweled throne in a huge palace) his majestic nature in this episode, thereby sanctioning the match Nṛsiṁha is initially hesitant to allow.[14] Advaita had already admitted his own ambivalence about marriage when his friends first broached the subject,[15] but in both accounts his reluctance to wed dissolves. In short, in Haricaraṇa's story he simply falls in love, while in Īśāna's his theophany confirms the appropriateness of the match.

Sītā's leadership potential, suggested in AP, comes to literary fruition in the two works entirely devoted to her. *Sītā Guṇa Kadamba* (SGK) by Viṣṇudāsa,[16] son of Mādhavendra Purī, has no extant manuscripts and has long been out of print. None of the major libraries in the region holds a copy. In the spring of 1996 Dr. Mohit Ray invited me to speak in Krishnanagar. As we corresponded to discuss my visit, he mentioned that he would be able to find me a copy of this work. Sure enough, he very generously, and at some difficulty, photocopied the first volume of the SGK from a friend's collection and presented it to me. That first volume is an introduction to the text with a summary. While I was able to learn a great deal from that introduction and summary, the following material must be understood as unavoidably culled from a secondary source, since I could not locate the actual text of the SGK.

SGK is a short composition, much of which is apparently devoted to Advaita Ācārya and his role in Caitanya's advent. Viṣṇudāsa mentions that when Advaita first came west from Sylhet he stayed with Mādhavendra Purī. If this were so then it would be only natural for Mādhavendra Purī, years later, to foster his own son with Advaita in return. Viṣṇudāsa in fact indicates that he spent many years in Advaita's household.[17] This sort of arrangement for fostering each oth-

er's sons was quite common among brahman families and is not entirely unusual even today.

Some material appearing in SGK differs from that found elsewhere. For example, Viṣṇudāsa writes that Sītā's father's name was Govinda Cakravarrtī, not Nṛsiṁha Bhāḍudi. He also gives an exact birth date for Sītā, which no other author does, but Hṛṣikeśa does not reveal that date in his introduction to the text. The SGK account of Caitanya's death agrees with those found in both Jayānanda's *Caitanya Maṅgala* and Narahari Cakravartī's *Bhakti Ratnākara* (but not with those in AP and SC). SGK presents more material regarding Mādhavendra Purī than is found elsewhere.[18] The text gives a full account (according to Hṛśikeśa) of Jaṅgalī and Nandinī and the story of Acyuta drinking some milk that had been reserved for Caitanya. Also, like SC, SGK indicates that Sītā was present at the birth of Caitanya. Unfortunately I am unable to provide further details, not having actually seen the text itself.

We turn now to the other work dedicated to Sītā Devī. The *Sītā Caritra* is probably the first work of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature whose protagonist is a (mortal) woman. (The few other parallels in South Asian literature of whom I am aware include Lallā of Kashmir[19] and Mirābāi.) Several works of Bengali *maṅgala kāvya* treat various goddesses, as do some very early works on Caṇḍī and Manasā.[20] Many of the Satya Pir/Satya Nārāyaṇa tales,[21] though composed much later and not biographical, feature strong female actors, often behaving in ways that defy our conventional stereotypes of South Asian women. But no one prior to Lokanātha Dāsa had taken a mortal female subject. The literary situation obviously reflects prevailing social conditions in seventeenth century Bengal. Upper-caste women in the eastern regions may not have had to live under all the social restrictions burdening their cousins in the central plains, but they still were not holding leadership positions in the community.

SC is not strictly biographical in that it does not relate the life history of Sītā but rather uses anecdotal material, in no particular or chronological order, to describe her as an adult married woman, her devotion to Caitanya, and her activities with her students. The text is particularly interesting for the purposes of this study because the edition published c. 1926 by Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi contains significantly more material than is found in the three extant (undated) manuscripts of that text. Those chapters that appear in the book but not in the manuscripts contain telling details concerning Jaṅgalī and Nandinī, though, interestingly, the sections describing Īśāna Dāsa's[22] service in Caitanya's household appear in all versions of the text. The texts mention nothing about Sītā's female disciples, although she must have had them because in SC she repeatedly states that she can teach only other women.

How do we explain the differences in length and content among the four extant versions of the text? The Pāṭhabāḍī manuscript is incomplete, but the two at the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat are not, though each ends at a different point in the narrative. Clearly the story was amplified, or edited, at least twice.

Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas often view such textual accretions not as extraneous padding, and certainly not as anything suspect, but as further elaboration of the truth contained in a given work. This elaboration may include exaggeration or even downright creative license to make the author's point about the stature and status of his protagonist. Such textual accretions are not regarded as dishonest but as reflections of the author's wholehearted devotion to his subject. Further, the actual author stands to accrue some karmic benefit by contributing to the good reputation of his subject—and by doing so in a way that is clearly not designed to garner that author any fame or other benefit. Although it is often quite apparent that a text has expanded, the most voluminous version is usually considered by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition to be the most authentic. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava secondary literature includes extensive discussion of *authenticity*, a term that appears to connote authoritativeness and/or acceptance by sectarian leaders, although the word is nowhere specifically defined. The last version of a given text reflects, as it were, the most complete picture of a particular subject and is thus the most revelatory also for the scholar. It tells us what the community ultimately deemed important about the subject. The notion of an Ur-text of any composition simply does not exist in this tradition, for that version would be viewed as no more significant than a rough draft. In other words, the search for origins is generally far less fruitful than the search for "becomings." Ideas about a protagonist (and especially of a religious leader of Advaita Ācārya's stature) usually change over time, and so the chronologically last text carries the greatest authority as it represents the cumulative wisdom of the school in question to that date. In this way a tradition, and in particular the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, uses hagiography to define itself, to flesh out its history and to ensure its enduring place in society. Therefore this study treats the most complete version of the SC available.[23]

The colophon of that version indicates that Lokanātha wrote the text in thirteen chapters. The chapter breaks, however, are not consistently indicated, and in fact in his introduction to the text Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi describes only nine, based upon the number of signature lines in the text. I have made some editorial decisions about how to break up the composition so that there are indeed thirteen separate chapters, using the narrative itself as a guide for so doing. My summary of the text follows, with some critical remarks.

Lokanātha introduces Sītā in the brief first chapter of SC as the mother of Advaita's five sons, Acyuta, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, Gopāla, Jagadīśa, and Balarāma.[24] The

author further praises Sītā for her own devotion to Caitanya. Early on Lokanātha establishes Sītā as a proper wife to Advaita and surrogate mother to her husband's pupils.

In the second chapter of SC, Lokanātha begins to elaborate on Sītā's devotion to Caitanya. Sītā crosses the river to Navadvīpa to visit the newborn Nimāñī (Caitanya). She casts a spell over his mother Śacī so that she can speak with the baby out of his mother's hearing. The baby reaches out to Sītā, calling out, "Rādhā!" Sītā immediately understands not only that the infant is actually Kṛṣṇa but also that he thinks he is in a different time and place, back in the cowherd village of Gokula. Sītā tells the infant that she is not the cowherd woman Rādhā but rather the brahman wife of Advaita. She explains to him that he (Kṛṣṇa, i.e, Caitanya) has been born now in Navadvīpa with a golden body (whereas in Gokula, Kṛṣṇa had a dark body). Nimāñī persists, claiming that Sītā is his Yogamāyā who precedes him in every birth. He insists that she has enchanted the whole world and caused it to forget about Kṛṣṇa. Sītā protests, reiterating that she is not the divine Rādhā but simply someone who wants to serve Rādhā's feet. The child speaks again, this time explaining that Sītā is Paurṇamāsī, who, the baby elaborates, is in charge of Kṛṣṇa's and Rādhā's activities in every age and who charges her disciples, Rādhā's female companions, to arrange the divine couple's love trysts. With that speech, the baby, still unconvinced, sends Sītā home to bring Advaita to see him.

Sītā's role in the birth of Caitanya in the SC is worth comparing with that of her husband at the same event as told in chapter 10 of AP. In the AP account of Caitanya's birth Advaita Ācārya, not Sītā, is present. While in all accounts Advaita Ācārya's pious imprecations are responsible for Kṛṣṇa's birth as Caitanya, in the AP account Advaita is more directly responsible and not simply through his prayers. As discussed in chapter 6, he mystically impregnates Śacī with the flowers from his worship in the river, which float several miles upstream and attach themselves to her body as she bathes.[25]

Shortly after Caitanya's birth Advaita appears in Navadvīpa. To the dismay of his distraught parents, the baby had been refusing to nurse. Advaita enters the childbirth room (normally off limits to those outside the immediate family) and evicts the new mother. Once he determines the cause of the problem (Śacī had not been properly initiated), he takes the role of the midwife and brings Caitanya outside into the world. Then he acts as guru and gives Śacī the mantra that will purify her so Caitanya will drink her milk. Thus in AP Advaita must tell the infant's mother her child's identity and initiate her so that the infant will thrive. In SC, in contrast, the child himself is confused, and it is up to Sītā to orient him to his present surroundings.[26]

The third chapter of SC opens several years later when Caitanya comes to live and study with Advaita, at whose house Sītā cares for him tenderly. The bulk of the chapter describes Sītā's treatment of Caitanya as her favorite son.

In chapter 4 we learn of the mystical connection between Caitanya and Sītā's eldest son, Acyuta. One day Sītā had set aside some cream as a treat for Caitanya and placed it, as housewives often did, in a pot hung from a bar on the ceiling. While she was out, her own son Acyuta came home very hungry and found and drank the cream. When Acyuta's mother learned that he had drunk Caitanya's treat, she became very angry and slapped him. She immediately regretted her action, cuddled the boy, and put him to bed. Later, when she was cooking dinner for her husband, Caitanya, sitting nearby, belched. She could smell the cream on his breath. Caitanya then showed her that the mark from the slap she had given Acyuta had appeared on his own back. Sītā was of course amazed, upset, and profusely apologetic and hastened to make amends by preparing food for the two boys to eat.

Caitanya leaves his guru to return home in chapter 5, throwing Advaita and Sītā into despair as he prepares to leave. Kṛṣṇa Miśra, the second son and Advaita's eventual spiritual heir, casually announces that Caitanya plans to become a renunciate and suggests a *sannyāsa* guru. This news surprises everyone, except Caitanya, who tells the family that he is always present in Kṛṣṇa Miśra's heart (and so, of course, Kṛṣṇa Miśra is aware of Caitanya's thoughts at any given moment).

In chapter 6 Lokanātha summarizes Caitanya's life, culminating with Caitanya's receipt of Advaita's famous letter dismissing him[27] and his subsequent disappearance in the Jagannātha Temple in Puri. As soon as the devotees who had been with him realized he was gone, they began to send out word. The community back home went into shock, and especially those at Advaita Ācārya's house. But Caitanya miraculously appeared to Sītā Devī to console her, telling her she had only a short time remaining on earth. This is the only textual reference in the entire corpus to Sītā's death, and it is only an allusion. Advaita rued his decision to send the fateful letter. Both were completely beside themselves with grief. And there the author leaves them, abruptly changing the subject with the beginning of the next chapter.

By the seventh chapter the author introduces Nandarāma and Yajñeśvara (alias Nandinī and Jaṅgalī), whose practices Lokanātha describes in detail in chapter 12. We have already seen something of these two in AM, in chapter 2. Lokanātha has much more to say about them than did Haricaraṇa. Jaṅgalī and Nandinī are two mysteriously transsexual devotees who dressed and behaved like women. Their sexual identities throughout Vaiṣṇava literature are ambiguous, but they were apparently biological men desirous of Sītā's spiritual instruc-

tion. Their story is rich in clues to Sītā's theological identity and the ways her movement chose to accommodate and contain that identity.

The text suggests that these two are among the first *sakhī bhāva* practitioners. As the name implies, the *sakhī bhāvas* adopt the mood and manners of Rādhā's girlfriends and often take the statement that Kṛṣṇa is the only male in Vraja to its most extreme conclusion. Many Gauḍīyas observe the perhaps related practice of *mañjarī sādhanā*, visualizing themselves as members of the inner circle of Rādhā's and Kṛṣṇa's very young female companions (the *mañjarīs*, or "unopened flower buds," that is, young adolescent women), waiting on the divine couple during their erotic encounters. The *sakhī bhāvas*, however, carry the imagery far beyond mere visualization, actually dressing and behaving as women throughout their lives, and some, apparently, even sacrifice their physical maleness to do so. The group, which still exists, is rarely discussed in scholarly literature and often dismissed in recent secondary literature as "deviant" because its followers are men who dress and behave as women.[28] Each adherent adopts a particular prescribed identity as one of Kṛṣṇa's female companions and assumes a specific responsibility in Kṛṣṇa's service using that companion's name. The guru selects names and identities from a set list of fourteen young girls who served Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their romantic trysts. *Sakhī bhāvakas* do not marry, spending their entire lives in devotional activities.

Unlike mainstream Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, whose elite core was dominated by brahmans, the *sakhī bhāvakas*, according to Sureścandra Banerji,[29] were from the lower classes. We have no way of confirming Banerji's assessment of the social origins of group members, and I strongly suspect his statement is simply an attempt to distance them from "respectable" Vaiṣṇavism.

Banerji reports that many consider the *sakhī bhāvakas* an important group. He agrees that they date from Caitanya's time but postulates their source to the statement of Rāmānanda Rāya and Svarūpa in the CC[30] that Caitanya was Rādhā. Whatever their origins, *sakhī bhāvakas* are clearly on the fringes of publicly acknowledged Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava society and a putative connection with someone so respected and above reproach as Sītā Devī can only be an attempt to force the greater community to recognize them as a legitimate group.

Because the *padāvalī* literature includes poems predating the SC that mention *sakhī bhāvakas*, we can be certain that Sītā is not the founder of this Gauḍīya offshoot, as Lokanātha seems to suggest. Lokanātha's suggestion points to the possibility that the *sakhī bhāvaka* school was founded in part as a concession to contemporary morality, which forbade a woman to look at a man to whom she was unrelated and forbade men from taking initiation from women. By making both devotees and their guru, Sītā, female, whatever transpires among them is

entirely in keeping with public morality and does not constitute any violation of gender segregation.[31]

The *sakhī bhāvakas* found it useful to appropriate Sītā's name and identity, much as some *sahajiyās* attempted to claim Advaita Ācārya as one of their own.[32] Advaita's respectability adhered to Sītā, adding to the esteem she herself brought to their marriage, and she in turn could pass that respectability on to others. That very appropriation as an act of legitimation clearly indicates the high regard in which Sītā Devī has been held over the centuries.

To return to Sītā's fascinating disciples, Nandarāma is a brahman, and his friend Yajñeśvara, a *śūdra*, is from a farming family. Both are great devotees of Kṛṣṇa and one day were lamenting their not having been able to find a suitable guru. Nandarāma remembers having been given a mantra some time previously by Sītā, in Shantipur, so the pair goes there to ask Sītā to accept them as her disciples.

Sītā greets them warmly, but tells them that she can only teach female disciples. Nonetheless, she gives them preliminary instruction to worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, meditating as attendants in the divine couple's trysting place. Sītā gives Nandarāma and Yajñeśvara some general guidelines for living as Vaiṣṇavas and reiterates that only females can study under her. Since the caste affiliations of the two are mentioned, but not commented upon, one must conclude that gender is of far greater import than caste to the author. And we know from other sources that Vaiṣṇava devotion itself confers brahman status.

When Sītā reminds the pair of the gender requirement for discipleship, the two disappear, returning a short time later dressed as cowherd girls, with braided hair, anklets, bangles, skirts, and bodices. They announce that the practice of repeating Rādhā's seed mantra has effected a sex change in them.[33] To prove that they are no longer male, they disrobe, and Sītā sees that they are, indeed, female. So great was their devotion and desire to learn from Sītā, rather than from any other guru, that these two were willing to relinquish their very maleness to do so. From this time on, Nandarāma and Yajñeśvara are known as Nandinī and Jaṅgalī, respectively.

The next chapter (8) continues on the same theme of the instruction of Nandarāma and Yajñeśvara, beginning with Sītā's detailed explanations of the specific practices the two are to use. The practice begins with meditation on the form of the guru. Next, the aspirants must recite the *Guru Gāyatrī* mantra[34] ten times, and meditate on the form of Caitanya. Thereafter they recite the Caitanya *Gāyatrī*[35] ten times, mentally worshipping Caitanya with water for washing and other offerings. After the worship of Caitanya, the devotees are to worship the teenage divine lovers, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, in their flower-bedecked bower, as if the meditators were themselves present and standing at the western entrance to the bower and their guru seated at another of the entrances. As they contemplate

the erotic activities of the couple, they should recite *Kāma Gāyatrī*[36] and the seed mantras of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.[37]

Sītā assigns Jaṅgalī and Nandinī the respective meditation roles of Vṛndā and Vīrā (two of Rādhā's girlfriends) to use in these meditative visualization practices and sends them out separately to live in the forest.

Lokanātha Dāsa has included four chapters[38] in all on Jaṅgalī and Nandinī; chapters 12 and 13 do not appear in the manuscript versions of the text. Collectively this substantial portion of the SC shows not only that Sītā Devī was an active guru herself, and probably connects her to the controversial *sakhī bhāvas*, but uses some standard legitimation techniques to do so as well. The author draws from well-known stories to demonstrate the inherent righteousness of his characters. Both disciples are separately portrayed as wronged women, compared implicitly with the great epic heroine Draupadī as they are brought before local officials and forced to endure the public humiliation of being disrobed in the court. Unlike Duḥṣasana, however, the officials in both these latter cases rue their actions the moment they realize their errors. Clearly the officials did not believe that these two were really female but rather that, for some reason, they had chosen to dress and live as women. Such perversion of social norms could not be permitted. But as soon as, in the case of Nandinī, the *nawab* saw that she was indeed menstruating and, in the case of Jaṅgalī, the governor[39] saw that she was truly female, the two men begged forgiveness most abjectly and gave the women generous grants of land.

Immediately after the *nawab*'s attempt to embarrass Nandinī, we learn that a very young girl has mysteriously become pregnant, as Sītā had previously predicted. She dies in childbirth, but her son announces "I am Nandinī's son." Are we to understand this statement literally, in which case clearly Nandinī is not truly female, but has been clandestinely engaging in at least one heterosexual relationship? If so, who is this infant, and who is the mother, in terms of the lineage? But we are only told that Nandinī takes the child to raise, and he is subsequently never mentioned in the text.

On the other hand, are we to understand that this supposed result of a virgin conception is Nandinī's, and hence Sītā's, spiritual, rather than merely biological, heir? His mysterious parentage would associate him with the miraculous and could constitute yet another miracle on Sītā's part, since she had predicted this event some time earlier. The author never returns to this child, leaving readers with only speculation about him. Either the author never returned to this thread of his narrative or the rest of the story was somehow lost. The undeveloped nature of this section of the narrative suggests that the author is using a tale from another source. Since this portion is found only in the published edition, we cannot explain it as mere scribal lapse.

In the final chapter of the SC we learn of Jaṅgalī's similar though even more puzzling experiences. The local governor, like the *nawab*, has come to investigate the reports he has heard about this strange ascetic woman.

Jaṅgalī warns the governor that if he touches her he will die. He ignores the warning and commands his attendant to remove the woman's garment. Jaṅgalī prays to Sītā, and then, no matter how much cloth the governor unwinds from her body, still more remains. Jaṅgalī, good disciple that she is, keeps her mind focused on Sītā's feet, and Sītā, in the form of Jaṅgalī's garment, protects her disciple. Sītā Devī, or at least her powers, are being equated with those of Kṛṣṇa, who protected Draupadī from a similarly threatened dishonor.

Everyone present was amazed to see this, and of course the governor was completely humiliated. But Jaṅgalī's death-curse also began to take effect: blood flowed from his mouth and his strength drained out of him. He fell to his feet and begged forgiveness and even asked his erstwhile victim to punish him. He claimed ignorance of local customs, as a foreigner.[40]

One may ask whether this episode constitutes an attempt on the author's part to make some subtle claims about the morals of Europeans; the governor is certainly not a Bengali. Such an attitude seems a bit anachronistic here and is more likely to appear in a composition produced during the years of the Indian nationalism movement. A much less literal reading of the material suggests that the author is making use of a rhetorical strategy to demonstrate how widespread was Sītā's influence and that she even managed to impress those beyond what we expect her social sphere to include. Not only does she inspire would-be disciples to abandon their male privileges to study with her, but even foreigners are impressed with her purity and want to know what inspires and motivates this behavior in her disciples.

We have still further confirmation of Jaṅgalī's powers as, shortly after the episode with the possibly European governor, the finance minister of Pāṇḍuā arrives, riding on a tiger, with a large group of fakirs.[41]

The tiger of course is a ferocious animal, and the minister's arrival seated on one is reminiscent of images of the Bengali folk god Dakṣīna Rāya, the southern lord who rules the forests of the Sundarbans, together with his consort Vana Bibi (the Forest Lady). People in the vicinity, an area once full of tigers who occasionally, driven by hunger, would maul humans, still pray to the couple for protection from tiger attack. The story of Dakṣīna Rāya was no doubt long a part of oral tradition, first recorded, so far as we know, by one Mādhava Ācārya, though his composition is no longer extant. Kṛṣṇarāma's *Rāya Maṅgala*, composed in 1786, refers to the earlier work.[42] The work treats, among other topics, a conflict between Dakṣīna Rāya, considered Hindu, and Baḍa Khān Gāzi, a Muslim ruler. Ultimately peace was established between the two, through divine intervention.

In the *Maṅgala* an army of fakirs supports the Gāzi; here in the *Sītā Caritra* story those fakirs join the *devan,* in the author's attempt to demonstrate Hindu-Muslim unity, and all come together to test Jangalī. The image of the official arriving on a tiger and then handing the animal off to Jaṅgalī's young disciple Haripriyā seems to incorporate both the local legend and the suggestion that Sītā is also Devī, the Great Goddess, who always appears with her tiger mount. The official has turned the vehicle of his power over to Sītā's camp.

Thus Lokanātha has demonstrated that Europeans, Hindus, and Muslims all celebrated this remarkable woman's spirituality. Lokanātha has broadened the usual message of inclusivity by having Europeans, who are even more outside the brahmanical social structure than Indian Muslims, accept the extraordinary figure. Because we see so few references in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava corpus to political activities, those we do find become all the more striking. Like the local *qazi* who had Haridāsa bound and beaten,[43] and later repented that behavior, here the British colonizers (or other foreign rulers) behave badly toward a saintly person, and come to regret their actions.

Also of great interest are the three chapters (9, 10, 11) devoted to Īśāna Dāsa, clearly to be understood as the Īśāna Nāgara of *Advaita Prakāśa* fame.[44] Lokanātha describes Īśāna as a young brahman boy but does not write of his mother, except to have Īśāna himself tell Sītā Devī that he has no family. He simply appears at Advaita's house (apparently in Navadvīpa, for he says he is from Shantipur, and later the family relocates to Shantipur). Advaita and his wife accept the boy as a servant, and send him to help Śacī take care of her new baby Nimāñī. Śacī accepts him as part of her family, and he lives with them until Caitanya leaves home as a renunciate.

Lokanātha recounts some miraculous events from this period. First, very early in his tenure with the family, Īśāna has an encounter with Nimāñī that puzzles him. The child, still an infant, suddenly asks his caretaker why he had forced him to leave his life in Vraja to come to Navadvīpa. Īśāna apparently recognizes the child as Kṛṣṇa but does not understand what he (Īśāna) could possibly have had to do with his (Caitanya's) appearance in Nadīyā, since Kṛṣṇa had himself brought all his friends and relatives along with him to Bengal. Īśāna explains that in the Vraja *līlā* he had been Rādhikā's maternal grandmother, trying to keep Rādhā out of trouble with Kṛṣṇa, but always somehow got herself entangled in all his trickery with the cowherd girls. And now the grandmother has been born into a Bengali brahman family, as a boy whom Advaita named Īśāna.[45] That was apparently the end of the discussion between the baby and his attendant, for the child embraced the older boy, glad to find another former companion from Vraja.

When Caitanya leaves home to become a *sannyāsī,* he asks Īśāna to look after his mother and wife and comfort them in their loneliness and then to return

to Advaita after their deaths. And thus we are told that the women died shortly after Caitanya himself, and that at that point the entire manifest *līlā*, that is, the actors from Vraja who had appeared in Bengal, was retracted back into the eternal Vraja. Īśāna, very distraught, returns to Advaita, now living in Shantipur.

He greets his old benefactor by saying "You are Caitanya, you are Kṛṣṇa, you are Viśvambhara"—high praise but also a clear statement of Advaita's theological identity as no different from that of Caitanya, already recognized as Kṛṣṇa. Advaita praises Īśāna for his service to Caitanya and turns him over now to serve Sītā Devī, who gives him the assignment of fetching water for the household.

Īśāna takes his responsibilities very seriously and immediately sets about his new task. He works so hard, Lokanātha tells us, that he fills a thousand pitchers daily with water. So engrossed is he in chanting the name of Hari and with his work that he does not notice the bugs that fall from the straw coil he had placed on his head on which to perch his pitcher. Eventually hundreds of bugs fall into his hair and make themselves at home, feeding on Īśāna's blood, but he remains heedless of them.

One day as he pours water for Advaita to wash his hands, one of the bugs falls to the ground. Īśāna, in a startling act of compassion for other creatures, calmly picks it up and puts it back on his head. The master sees this and marvels, and when he questions his servant about this peculiar action, Īśāna shows him his head, full of the bugs. Sītā, in the kitchen, hears the commotion and runs out to see what is going on. She feels great compassion for the young man and places her hands on his head; immediately the bugs vanish. This is the only instance we have of Sītā healing someone, certainly yet another of her miracles.

In the following chapter (11) we have a very different anecdote concerning Īśāna. Advaita's entire family and all his disciples are going to Nīlambara's house for a great celebration with the entire Vaiṣṇava community. Four of the disciples, including Īśāna Dāsa and his friend Jānu Rāya, carry Sītā in a palanquin on their shoulders. Jānu wants the two to carry Sītā by themselves, so that they would get the entire blessing from this service and not have to share it with other carriers. Īśāna knows they should not do this, but, perhaps out of loyalty to his friend, he consents. Jānu thinks, as they proceed, that he would one day be rewarded for this pious act and someone else would carry him in a palanquin. Sītā magically realizes what the two are doing and what Jānu is thinking. She makes them stop, gets out of the palanquin, and scolds them severely. She points out to Jānu that with all this thought of palanquins, he has been contemplating God's awesome majesty, not (it is implied) a more personal relationship with the divine. Certainly one does not carry a close friend in such a conveyance but rather someone of distant, and greater, stature than oneself. And so Jānu must leave the Ācāryānī's circle, as he has exhibited the wrong attitude entirely.

This news is devastating to Jānu, who cannot understand why she is banishing him. This episode is the only one in which Lokanātha depicts a stern Sītā, and so it is somewhat jarring. But we have already seen her husband banishing some of his disciples for their preference of monism over dualistic Vaiṣṇavism, in chapter 20 of the AP (although in that instance the abandonment appears to be mutual), and of Caitanya banishing a disciple for having begged some rice from a woman.[46] Thus it was not an anomalous practice in the community.

Sītā continues to explain that she will not live much longer and that Jānu's family will never be Vaiṣṇava but will rather be involved in Vedic religious observance (which good Gauḍīyas would regard as not merely old-fashioned but useless). She continues with words of reprimand for Īśāna for his part in the palanquin episode and then tells Īśāna he must now get married. The author appears to be making a causal connection between her displeasure at Īśāna's participation in the palanquin episode and her command to him to marry; she seems to be issuing a punitive order. And Īśāna understands it as such, for her command does not please him. He felt his duty did not lie in family life and wanted instead to live out his days as Sītā's servant. Sītā's words become more dire, however, as she says that all the property he has acquired to date will be taken over by brahman Vaiṣṇavas. She does prophesy that he will have three sons, the eldest of whom will be a particularly dedicated Vaiṣṇava, and her words let him know that his exile from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community is not permanent.

Īśāna swears his undying loyalty to Sītā and Advaita, and, as his last act, upon leaving, he reconciles Kṛṣṇa Miśra with his mother. The author gives only a sentence to the reconciliation and nothing at all about what necessitated it. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature says little in specific terms about the internal conflicts dividing the school, and the various authors seem determined to make light of the squabbles among the several factions. But, as we know from secondary sources, the divisions were already deep even during Caitanya's lifetime.

Sītā Devī's Theological Identity

The literature devoted to Sītā and Advaita shows her vital role in the newly developing movement on several different levels, usually in metaphorical terms. Advaita Ācārya, representative of the "old guard" of brahmanical scholarship and praxis, stands not only first in the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism but also at the head of a continuum[47] of devotionalism, which reaches from his awesome reverence to the erotic relationship with the divine embodied in the androgynous incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the single body of Caitanya. Advaita's wife, his female counterpart, must have a compatible theological identity, as the

two function together to form the base of the new structure created by Caitanya. Thus the texts usually depict Sītā in the same majestic mode as her husband. Each of the authors of works treating Advaita or Sītā describes this partnership in his own terms, all based on sectarian doctrine.

In the two Advaita hagiographies Sītā is sketched as the appropriate helpmate to her husband. Haricaraṇa Dāsa, author of *Advaita Maṅgala*, describes Sītā as an extraordinary individual, claiming her to be the goddess Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth, is the consort of Mahāviṣṇu, with whom Advaita Ācārya has been identified in the text.[48] This parallel assertion is deliberate and significant, for Mahāviṣṇu and his wife are awesome representations of divinity, majestic and unapproachable. As the continuum of devotion discussed above illustrates, their entrance into the phenomenal world of necessity precedes that of the more approachable and adorable child Kṛṣṇa.

Mahāviṣṇu is the mighty, awe-inspiring four- (or more) armed form often pictured reclining on the many-headed serpent Ananta in the cosmic ocean of milk in which Viṣṇu rests between cycles of creation. His consort Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth, is usually depicted massaging his feet. According to Vaiṣṇavas, all existence arises from Mahāviṣṇu. That is, the new age is produced and brought forth by Mahāviṣṇu, a concept that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas interpret as symbolized in Advaita Ācārya's agency in the advent of Caitanya and the concomitant "new age" of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotionalism when the entire eternal Vraja *līlā* reappeared in Nadīya.

Recall when Haricaraṇa Dāsa told us that Sītā's hair came unbound while she was serving food to an assembly of Vaiṣṇavas. With her display of the four-armed form, Sītā revealed herself to be Īśvarī (appropriately, the female counterpart to Advaita's majestic and awe-inspiring Īśvara). When Advaita noticed his wife's four arms, Haricaraṇa writes, he explained her theophany by saying that he himself had been Kṛṣṇa in Vraja.

Why does Haricaraṇa have Advaita announce himself to be the Kṛṣṇa of Vraja in response? Is the author asserting that Advaita is Caitanya's theological equal? The Kṛṣṇa of Vraja never appears in majestic form in the company of Rādhā, whose relationship with Kṛṣṇa is the closest possible human relationship. Sītā does not appear in this episode as Rādhā, but as Īśvarī. But Haricaraṇa very shortly will equate Advaita's wife with Rādhā, but not with Rādhā as we usually envision her. He will tell us, using these metaphors indicating various types of Vaiṣṇava divinity, that Advaita is very nearly Caitanya's equal and is his necessary precursor.

In the episode just mentioned Advaita next announces that he had pledged to bring Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to Navadvīpa, together in a single body. Haricaraṇa has thus asserted that Kṛṣṇa first descended to earth in Advaita, who then became a condition for Caitanya's advent. He implies that Advaita was necessarily accom-

panied by Rādhā in the form of Sītā. But while Rādhā is usually associated with erotic love, Haricaraṇa's assertion of Sītā as Rādhā is clearly at the other end of the devotional spectrum. So far this particular piece of inferred logic is indeed coherent, but the metaphor is still under construction.

That construction becomes complete very shortly, when we read of another feast where multiple Sītās are serving the guests (and providing each with his favorite dishes), much as multiple Kṛṣṇas had danced with the cowherd girls of Vraja in the moonlight of the *rāsa līlā*. Caitanya comments on this occasion that Sītā is like Rādhā, that few people realize Rādhā's majesty, but that this present group has been granted a rare vision of that aspect of her divinity for themselves. I am aware of no other postulation of Rādhā as *aiśvarya*, and so Caitanya's comment on this is all the more extraordinary. Sometimes, in Bengali Vaiṣṇava literature, the term *aiśvarya* means merely "divinity," but since Caitanya is speaking here explicitly of Rādhā, who comprises half of the divine couple who serve as the object of worship by the community, that sense of the word does not fit. Caitanya normally extols the virtues of the more intimate sorts of relationship with the divine, but here clearly is praising the majestic aspect of Rādhā. And this is as it should be, and fits the overall scheme, for *that* Rādhā, the majestic one, is indeed the appropriate partner for Advaita Ācārya, the first Kṛṣṇa to enter the scene. Sītā's majestic nature is vital to her maintaining the parallel with her husband.

Sītā reveals her divinity under quite different circumstances than does her husband. Advaita's theophanies serve as rewards to followers in whom understanding has awakened. Sītā, on the other hand, seems to reveal herself to make a theological point, but in ways connected with her gender. Loose hair, for example, would mark her as a loose woman and so cannot be tolerated. That loose hair provides the excuse for her theophany, just as did the occasion of her serving all the devotees individually. But when Advaita does manifest his divine form, he nearly always reveals more than two arms, as does Sītā in the hair-tying episode mentioned above. The Kṛṣṇa of Vraja is always two-armed, a very human god with whom all the cowherds have very human relationships. If Advaita is Kṛṣṇa, he must be the Kṛṣṇa of Dvārakā, not the Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, and Sītā must be one of his proper wives and not a cowherd girl with whom he would have a *parakīya*[49] relationship.

Advaita Ācārya as Mahāviṣṇu stands at the beginning of the devotional continuum. Sītā's association with Lakṣmī parallels her husband's image as the majestic aspect of the divine, while her birth in the hundred-petalled lotus, symbolizing the heart *cakra*, an emotional relationship with the divine, places her simultaneously further along the continuum than her husband. Sītā's relationship to Caitanya, and to her own sons, for example, exhibits pa-

rental affection (though this is what we would expect of any mother in that situation).

Īśāna Nāgara in his *Advaita Prakāśa* has much more to say about Sītā than does Haricaraṇa in the *Advaita Maṅgala.* He portrays Sītā simultaneously as the perfect brahman housewife and as a divine manifestation. As the perfect housewife, Sītā fulfills the customary obligations of a woman of her social class and demonstrates, through her behavior, that she understands and accepts her traditional role. Sītā's conforming to social expectations in Īśāna's work forms the base for her character. Her exemplary domesticity anchors her firmly in respectability, just as her husband's erudition did for him, and provides a parallelism in the images of the couple. Once Īśāna has clearly established Sītā as a proper brahman woman who knows her place in society, he can then establish her as divine and capable of extraordinary feats and roles. The author skillfully demonstrates Sītā's suitability for eventual sectarian leadership (a role up until that time normally played only by men) by expanding her portrait beyond the framework of the traditional housewife to include that of the saint. Yet at no time does Sītā abandon her societally sanctioned role as she expands into other realms.

In the account of Caitanya's birth in the SC, the baby addresses Sītā first as Rādhā, then as Yogamāyā, and finally as Paurṇamāsī. Having just arrived from the eternal Vraja, he is a bit confused, apparently, and has not quite recognized his new surroundings. But he does recognize this woman before him as someone very close to him and, in fact, as three individuals with whom he has enjoyed various types of intimacy.

Sītā denies the baby's insistence that she is Rādhā, protesting that she is the brahman wife of Advaita Ācārya. The child's response that she is his Yogamāyā[50] is extremely significant: he accuses her of charming the world to forget Kṛṣṇa. With this assertion Caitanya makes her the agent responsible for the conditions that impelled Advaita Ācārya to undertake the years of austerities and prayers that resulted in Kṛṣṇa's incarnation as this infant. Without Sītā's/Yogamāyā's activities Advaita's work would not have been possible, and so she becomes necessarily responsible, with her husband, for Caitanya's advent. The roles of the spouses are complementary: Sītā prepares the ground upon which Advaita works to pave the way for Caitanya. It is worth noting that the role of Ananta/Śeṣa who prepares the locus for Kṛṣṇa's advent is always, in the Caitanya biographies, played by Nityānanda, who is often thought of as Caitanya's elder brother. In the Advaita biographies Nityānanda is not mentioned in this connection. The presentation of Sītā-Advaita in this role is a conscious usurpation of Nityānanda's position in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, for as pious brahmans they cannot occupy a position subordinate to the *avadhūta* who deliberately breaks caste rules at every opportunity (as the Caitanya hagiographies postulate).

With this last example Advaita's school embraces yet another part of the range of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotion. More important, Lokanātha has obviated the need for anyone other than Advaita and Sītā. He has conferred Nityānanda's usual role upon the couple and hardly mentions Nityānanda—whose school was and is by far the largest Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava group—at all.

Caitanya's third assertion, that Sītā is Paurṇamāsī, neatly closes the discussion and constitutes the final clue to Sītā's identity. For just as Paurṇamāsī engineered the meetings of the divine lovers Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Lokanātha Dāsa tells us, Sītā too has brought the couple together in the person of the newborn infant who will become known as Caitanya. Her husband is credited with having brought Kṛṣṇa to earth as Caitanya, but here Lokanātha Dāsa gives Sītā the credit, albeit indirectly and through her former identity as Paurṇamāsī, for the dual incarnation.

Lokanātha Dāsa's manipulation of the theological image is meaningful not only for the factors described above and because it connects the extremes of the continuum of devotion. This manipulation, with its focus on the importance of a couple, also begins to move them in the direction of the (later) *sahajiyā* texts of the Advaita Ācārya corpus, wherein the erotic mood replaces majesty and reverence. In so doing Lokanātha begins with the already accepted premise of Caitanya as a dual incarnation and uses that image to draw new conclusions about Sītā Devī. He highlights the role of this individual who has remained in the background in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature until this time.

Lokanātha carries Sītā's lineage into the future with the discussions of Jaṅgalī and Nandinī. Particularly intriguing is the acceptance the two receive, individually, for their anomalous variety of Vaiṣṇava piety. Although Lokanātha devotes four chapters to these two, Sītā is only present initially in the tales about Jaṅgalī and Nandinī. She is, however, the inspiration for their every act. Lokanātha connects Sītā so explicitly with these two unusual Vaiṣṇavas that something more is clearly operating here.

Sītā and the Succession

Unexpected events often follow the loss of a charismatic leader and his or her followers' attempts to fill the resultant void. The second generation can sometimes have a greater impact on a movement's self-definition and future directions than its very instigators, who may themselves have attempted, prior to death, to guide their movement's future. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava authors through the centuries have reached back to that second generation[51] for the material with which to shape their visions of their community.

Both AP and AM agree that Advaita Ācārya had six sons. The author of AM says that the second son, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, was the son of Śrī, and the others (Acyutānanda, Gopāla, Balarāma, and the twins, Jagadīśa and Rūpa) were all Sītā's sons. Īśāna Nāgara, however, contests this generally accepted view of Kṛṣṇa Miśra's maternity. He writes in AP that when Sītā was about to deliver her second child Śrī was also pregnant, and the two sisters delivered at the same time. Sītā produced a healthy boy but Śrī's son was stillborn. Śrī was devastated by the death of her child. Sītā already had one son, and so set aside her own joy in her newborn son out of compassion for her sister's suffering and took the remarkable action of asking Advaita for permission to trade infants with Śrī so that her sister could raise the healthy infant as her own. Advaita agreed. Consequently the world knows Kṛṣṇa Miśra as Śrī's son while only a few people are privy to the secret that Sītā was actually his biological mother.[52]

Lokanātha Dāsa, writing some time later, seems to have accepted Īśāna's statement that Sītā was Kṛṣṇa Miśra's mother, because in his introduction to SC Lokanātha includes him in the list of Sītā's five sons.

One might wonder why Īśāna has chosen to circulate his account of Kṛṣṇa Miśra's maternity, since he tells us it is a deep secret. No other authors discuss this. The word used in the text is *rahasya*, which, in addition to meaning "secret," can also mean "mysterious" or "difficult to understand." This is a rhetorical strategy. Until Īśāna raises the matter, there has been no mystery whatsoever surrounding Kṛṣṇa Miśra's maternity, as it had never been questioned by any other writer; Kṛṣṇa Miśra is elsewhere always described as the only son of the secondary wife, Śrī. And given the strength of the mother-son bond in South Asia, Sītā's willingness to give her own son to Śrī is indeed difficult to understand or even believe. That selfless act serves to highlight Sītā's unusual compassion as she is once again shown to exceed the expectations of a cowife.

The very inclusion of this previously privileged information is telling in itself. In calling it a secret Īśāna is making use of the rhetorical strategy to increase the stature of the lineage: he has introduced a new concept regarding Sītā, a "truth" whose secrecy had heretofore cloaked both Sītā's and Kṛṣṇa Miśra's identities and whose revelation not only enhances her position in the movement but also bolsters the claims of Kṛṣṇa Miśra's descendants to sectarian authority. Īśāna is taking advantage of what had up until now been public knowledge regarding Kṛṣṇa Miśra's maternity to subvert it. With this secret information about Kṛṣṇa Miśra's mother, Īśāna elevates the stature of Kṛṣṇa Miśra and, through him, of Advaita's entire lineage.

The subterfuge becomes particularly intriguing near the end of AP, when Advaita Ācārya calls all his sons together to give them his final instructions and to distribute his property among them. The son of a secondary wife like Śrī usually

is considered to have a less legitimate claim to inheritance than his half-brothers by the chief wife. Only householders can inherit, however, and four of Advaita's six sons had chosen monastic lives. Advaita's eldest son Acyuta is described as having "a deep attachment to Kṛṣṇa and the Vaiṣṇavas" and as "completely indifferent to the world"[53] from childhood. Acyuta never displayed the slightest inclination for marriage and family life and was always absorbed in worshipping Kṛṣṇa. Although Advaita Ācārya is clearly proud of his eldest son, the estate must be passed to a householder and not to a son who has renounced the mundane world.

Thus Advaita cannot follow the usual inheritance pattern of primogeniture in the transmission of either his worldly wealth or his religious position. Kṛṣṇa Miśra and Balarāma (the fourth son) married and produced offspring, so only they were eligible to inherit (and, more important, to pass on) their father's considerable wealth and position. (Haricaraṇa also mentions this unusual succession in his AM, but does so almost in passing.) None of the literature suggests that this was not the way the historical events transpired, and we have no reason to doubt that this was indeed the case. The genealogical records maintained by the temples in Shantipur also support this assertion. Īśāna writes that Advaita Ācārya bequeathed his material wealth to Balarāma and his temple responsibilities to Kṛṣṇa Miśra. Kṛṣṇa Miśra is not only married but has already produced the requisite sons that would allow their grandfather to retreat from his family responsibilities and advance to the next stage of life. Therefore Advaita deems his second son Kṛṣṇa Miśra, and his grandsons Raghunātha and Dolagovinda, fit to take on the responsibility of serving Advaita Ācārya's own image of Madana Gopāla. With the eldest son Acyuta's blessing and acquiescence, Advaita confers the family's religious duties upon Kṛṣṇa Miśra.

That second son, according to AP, though generally recognized as the only son of Śrī, is actually the son of Lakṣmī (Sītā) and Mahāviṣṇu. Śrī, generally understood to be Kṛṣṇa Miśra's mother, is identified with Lakṣmī only secondarily, by association with her sister Sītā, who, Īśāna has already told us, was found in a lotus in a marsh by her father when she was a child. That is, Sītā *is* the goddess Lakṣmī. Obviously the suitable mother of the torchbearer of Advaita Ācārya's lineage is Sītā-Lakṣmī, and not the more obscure Śrī. Īśāna needs to make Sītā Kṛṣṇa Miśra's mother, regardless of the actual truth of the assertion, to help bolster his position that Advaita Ācārya was actually the most significant member of the Navadvīpa *līlā*. This claim contains the implicit assumption that Advaita's contemporary followers and descendants are equally worthy of respect and deference.

In time, when Kṛṣṇa Miśra was acknowledged as his father's successor, this "proof" of his true maternity would coalesce the lineage into the one mother, a point that would have ramifications in later years when fragments of that splin-

tered lineage would vie for authority. PV, AP, and Narahari Cakravarti's *Narottama Vilāsa* all indicate that mother and sons were initially at odds but eventually reconciled.[54] Ramakanta Chakrabarty suggests that Advaita Ācārya's following split into at least three rival groups following the leader's death. One group was led by Sītā Devī, one by her eldest son Acyutānanda, and the third by some of Advaita's other sons and the renegade disciple Kāmadeva Nāgara (whom Īśāna describes in chapter 20 of AP as having refused to renounce Advaita's prior teachings of monism for dualistic devotionalism). According to the PV and the SC, a rift between Sītā and her son Kṛṣṇa Miśra was mended through the efforts of Īśāna Dāsa and Jānu Rāya at a *kīrtana* festival. Since we readers of AP know that both Kṛṣṇa Miśra and Balarāma (Advaita's acknowledged official heirs) are sons of Sītā/Lakṣmī, Īśāna can plant the subliminal suggestion that in reality there is no divisiveness in the school. That is to say, the groups are branches of the same tree.

The author of the AP takes this assertion of essential unity still further: Kṛṣṇa Miśra's sons, according to Caitanya's promise to Advaita in chapter 21 of AP, constitute the reappearance of Caitanya and Nityānanda, returned to Advaita's household to console him in his grief at the separation from his deceased companions. Nityānanda is identified as Kṛṣṇa's elder brother Balarāma and Caitanya is identified as Kṛṣṇa, and so Advaita's grandsons symbolically reunite the Vaiṣṇava community after years of divisive quarreling between Advaita Ācārya and Nityānanda and bring them all under the mantle of Advaita. Nityānanda's followers have always outnumbered Advaita's. Thus Advaita's school has managed to ignore their numerical disadvantage and absorb their closest competition. And, because it does this through Sītā's sons, the move also serves to enhance Sītā's status within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community.

Īśāna Nāgara addresses the problem of sectarian dissension repeatedly, though never directly, and in ways that eventually accomplish two goals. First, he establishes Kṛṣṇa Miśra as the legitimate heir to his father's sectarian heritage and, second, in the process, Sītā Devī's stature within the sect grows until she becomes an unquestionably sanctioned leader herself. The latter process is of interest here, revealing as it does one way hagiography is used in community formation. Sītā's treatment in the early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava works (where she is barely mentioned) versus her treatment in later compositions makes this clear. As Sītā appears in each subsequent work of the Advaita Ācārya corpus, she becomes more and more divine. The internal evidence of her changing role in a shrinking community will support the conclusions regarding dating of the various texts of the Advaita Ācārya corpus.

Kṛṣṇa Miśra's significance does not end there, however, nor does Acyuta entirely fade into obscurity. Both leave deep marks on their father's school. Kṛṣṇa Miśra the householder and Acyuta the ascetic parallel Caitanya's early (house-

holder) and later (renunciate) life and present the two Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ideals of the householder (bearing the title Gosvāmī, the surname still used by Advaita's descendants) and the renunciate. The author sets the reader up to expect to find the full range of possibilities in the Advaita lineage, as Advaita's sons themselves demonstrate every avenue of devotional expression available to a Vaiṣṇava. And yet the various authors describe this variety only by example, never specifically. His followers too continue this demonstration, from Kāmadeva who cannot fathom emotional dualism to the eldest son Acyuta, who has been lost in devotion for Kṛṣṇa since his early childhood. Thus in Advaita the continuum of devotion becomes a closed circle, with neither beginning nor end point, wherein all devotional possibilities can be found, coexisting harmoniously.

None of the authors mentions Śrī after Advaita Ācārya's sons reach adulthood. If Śrī ever produced more children, they must have been girls (who would have been married out of the family and thus play no role in sectarian evolution), because there is no evidence of Advaita's having fathered any children other than the six sons mentioned in the texts.

The descriptions of Sītā are in every case written by men who were intimately linked to their contemporary Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava power structures, probably all writing with political agenda of their own. Sītā may have enjoyed an amount of sectarian power herself such that other devotees of her late husband attached themselves to her following her husband's death. This shift may have been perceived as a threat to the rest of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community and would help to explain the emphasis on Sītā's "proper" statement that she can instruct only women. Limiting her teachings to one group (a group that has virtually no role in the community) effectively contains the power her hagiographers describe. Disciples like Jaṅgalī and Nandinī, that is, men who perform their worship of Kṛṣṇa in female guise, either through meditative visualization or in actual physical manifestation, are considered proper devotees of Kṛṣṇa, entitled to membership in Advaita's school, though this was not the case prior to their apparent gender shift. Perhaps Sītā's male followers were thus forced to choose this subversive means of disguising themselves as women to maintain their relationship with their guru. (We have no material mentioning her connections with any other specific disciples, male or female, aside from these two, and Īśāna and Jānu, both of whom she sent away.) The issue further suggests continued communal discomfort over leadership at the (uncertain) time these works were produced, as evidenced by the different agendas we find in the different works. The author of the *Advaita Prakāśa* writes to establish the legitimacy of a particular lineage, through Advaita's second son, citing Sītā's mythological birth and identity with Lakṣmī as part of his proof. The author

of the *Sītā Caritra,* probably writing at a time when the *sakhī bhāvas* were coming under sectarian assault, used Sītā's hagiographical image to define the *sakhī bhāvas* as women and then to connect their sect to a venerable branch of the greater Gauḍīya community.

Sītā Devī is clearly affiliated with an important lineage in a widely recognized tradition. In fact the very unorthodox *sakhī bhāvas* appear to have made use of that status in their own attempts at sectarian legitimation. She was a married woman, mother of several sons, and was living as any other brahman householder. And of course she did not remarry after her husband's death.

Certainly attention in all the texts is drawn to her gender, and in fact her gender was quite problematic for the Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal. Later writers had to find a way to talk about her that would make it clear that her case is very unusual, lest other women develop similar aspirations.

Sītā's leadership role is not supposed to be the model for other women in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community. Female devotees are exhorted rather to emulate her devoted service to her family. And although she was permitted to provide religious instruction to other women, she was not preparing them to serve a function similar to her own within the community. Sītā had no message of her own to propagate and is consistently portrayed as merely carrying on her husband's mission of spreading the joint worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. She had no feminist agenda, made no effort to change "the system" at all, but merely strove to fulfill an obligation that had landed on her shoulders, probably unsought. Thus Sītā Devī, or at least the Sītā Devī of literature, is sectarian leader who remained firmly planted in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, despite the anomaly of the role in which she found herself. Perhaps in her case this religious authority was simply thrust upon her. That placed her followers and defenders in the position of having to demonstrate her right to a position of authority, a claim that could be very difficult for a woman to defend. But then the community did indeed accept that authority, and so Sītā's leadership constituted the next stage in a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava lineage that continues, through the couple's second son Kṛṣṇa Miśra, to the present day in Shantipur, West Bengal.

The unusual amount of attention Sītā receives in the Advaita Ācārya corpus reveals several significant points. First of all, this woman anomalously rose to a position of power, and that fact needed to be accounted for. Yet Sītā is drawn not as an individual, but rather her character is recreated to conform to a desired pattern. At first it would appear that pattern is simply that of sectarian leader, but, as we read through more and more of the literature in which she figures prominently, we begin to discover something much more dramatic. Very cleverly, and in keeping with the already established motif of her husband as the instigator, the necessary cause, for the incarnation for the Kali Yuga, Lokanātha

Dāsa draws a Sītā who is not only a religious leader, not only the wife of a great man, not only somewhat divine in her own right, but the very cause of the most unique feature of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology: the dual incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and his favorite lover Rādhā in the body of a single human being, so that the lovers can experience what each other feels in their union.

Having posited Sītā in that remarkable position, Lokanātha proceeds to connect her to some devotees associated with the early days of the controversial *sakhī bhāva* school in a move clearly designed to demonstrate that group's claim to membership in the Vaiṣṇava fold as genuine and legitimate. While it is not at all unusual for one group to attempt to appropriate the good name and reputation of another group or individual to bolster their own status, the inclusion of these sections pertaining to Jaṅgalī and Nandinī is indeed curious as their tone and content are quite different from those of the rest of the text.

Nearly equally as curious are the three chapters Lokanātha dedicates to Īśāna Dāsa. The reader is almost certainly expected to understand this Īśāna to be the same Īśāna who composed the *Advaita Prakāśa* and who is otherwise invisible in Gauḍīya literature. Lokanātha explains the very intimate position Īśāna occupied in both Caitanya's and Advaita's families. As Caitanya's main caregiver he would certainly have been privy to the miraculous events of the boy's life, and the two would have developed a very close and affectionate relationship. And, as water bearer for Advaita's family, much the same situation would have adhered. Thus Īśāna is certainly a reliable witness to the various events and miracles he describes in his own book, many of which would not have been observed by the general public, and, Lokanātha implies, Īśāna's integrity is beyond question.

Sītā Devī may be beyond the reach of empirical historical research, but she has become a figure larger-than-life in the eyes of her followers, and her identity too is not so much that of an individual woman but rather conforms to various notions about (to use Western terminology) sainthood. Indeed, the notion of individuality would seem to be incompatible with that notion (regardless of that figure's gender). The saint is a human being, but one possessed of superhuman qualities. She must embody all virtues and strengths of which ordinary persons display only a few. Her life must be characterized by miraculous events of which she is either the agent or the object.

Given the status and stature the Caitanya tradition confers on Advaita Ācārya and his lineage, what motivated the authors of the Sītā-Advaita hagiographical corpus to elaborate on Advaita's already significant image within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school? In fact, many questions surround these texts and their respective provenances, and I will now turn to those broader issues in chapter 9, after first discussing Advaita Ācārya's position today.

8

Advaita Ācārya Today

MOST OF ADVAITA ĀCĀRYA'S DIRECT DESCENDANTS continue to live in the town of Shantipur, and some relatives remain in Sylhet, in northeastern Bangladesh.[1] Although Advaita aligned himself with Caitanya, he nevertheless had many devotees of his own, and his lineage continues through his biological descendants. Disagreements among his six sons late in Advaita's own life resulted in fragmentation of the lineage, and now descendants of various of the sons manage several different temples in the town of Shantipur. Ramakanta Chakrabarty told me on a number of occasions he had observed that the two groups are estranged. A third, smaller, group settled in Vṛndāvana several generations ago, and its various members maintain a few temples, with images of Advaita Ācārya among those worshipped. Although this is a textual study, I was curious to meet any of Advaita's descendants that I could, to learn how they view themselves in light of their ancestor and the extent to which his hagiographies play any role in their lives.

By sheer serendipity, on November 1, 1992, the West Bengal Tourist Authority (WBTA) launched its first official tour to Shantipur and Māyāpur, and I was able to go along. The national highway runs through the small town of Shantipur, and interstate buses and trucks ply along it, but most of the roads in Shantipur are quite narrow, never intended to accommodate motor vehicular traffic. Rather the traffic is usually limited to bicycles, motor scooters, cows, and pedestrians. Since there are no sidewalks, front doors give immediately onto the street.

The town contains eleven temples connected with Advaita Ācārya,[2] but also several Śākta temples, confirming what history suggests about worship of the goddess being long established in this region. Still today the rivalry between Vaiṣṇava and Śākta followers persists, to some degree, and Vaiṣṇavas can be heard to denigrate Śākta devotees during various goddess festivals; no doubt the reverse is equally true.

Our group was received at the Shantipur Municipal Offices by the head of the city council and many very polite speeches to mark the occasion, including several references to Advaita Ācārya. We learned that while Shantipur is an important center of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, it has been the site of Śākta worship for far longer. The tour took us through several of the Vaiṣṇava temples in town, most of which are connected with Advaita or one of his sons, and several Kālī temples.

We then visited Bāblā, just outside of town, where, stories have it, Caitanya beat Advaita for preaching *jñāna* instead of *bhakti*. Bāblā is no longer on the riverbank as it was in Advaita's day, but a small tributary still flows next to it. The place is especially beautiful, with mango and other trees hanging very low and small boys herding their cows and goats around them. One almost expects to see Kṛṣṇa himself dance out from behind one of the trees, playing his flute.

The tour stopped for lunch at the Baḍa Gosvāmī Temple, also called the Mathureśa temple, established by Acyuta, Advaita's eldest son. The food was served on banana leaves and attentively prepared: mountains of rice accompanied by Caitanya's favorite spinach dish, *mocha* (banana flower), potatoes, two other vegetable dishes, eggplant pakora, dal, chutney, rice pudding, sweet yogurt, and two kinds of Bengali sweets. Fortunately the cows showed up just as we were finishing and took care of our messy banana leaves.

Mr. Chatterjee of the WBTA, our guide, knew most of the Shantipur Goswamis very well and sent me back for a second visit with letters of introduction. In January I was able to return and made my way to the home of Mrs. Manjulika Goswami at Madangopāla Pāḍā, the cluster of houses surrounding the main temple temple of Advaita Ācārya's lineage.

Madana Gopāla Jīū, the temple Advaita himself founded with his own image of Madana Gopāla, is a traditional seventeenth-century Bengali bread-loaf style edifice. A verandah surrounds the temple, and the images are housed in a very small room in the center. Facing the temple itself is a *maṇḍapa*, an open-sided, roofed pavilion where devotees gather to sing *kīrtana* and recite passages from various scriptures. Between the temple and the *maṇḍapa* is an open area where people gather on feast days to sit and partake of the meals being served. And around the perimeter of the property are the houses of the various families descended from Advaita's second son, Kṛṣṇa Miśra. These houses are middle class Bengali houses, with outhouses for bathing and toilet purposes, wells, and sometimes a cowshed. Despite the lack of running water, the houses are solid and comfortable and in recent years have been equipped with electricity so that the families now enjoy such modern conveniences as televisions and telephones.

Mrs. Goswami (Mañjulikā-dī)[3] is a high school English teacher, and her late husband was the direct descendant of Advaita Ācārya through his second son, Kṛṣṇa Miśra. She introduced me to two local scholar-devotees, Mr. Balai Lal

Mukherjee and Mr. Asoka Datta. All three spent a great deal of time with me discussing Advaita Ācārya and the various texts treating him and accompanying me to the other temples connected with Advaita and his family. During the course of our conversations I asked about the profusion of hagiographies and asked if they could shed any light on the situation. None of them had much to say about the controversial AP and BLS. Mr. Mukherjee told me that the *Advaita Prakāśa* contains some "intrusion," but that intrusion helps one to assess the sociological conditions of the time. He accepts Īśāna Nāgara's self-identification as a close associate of Advaita and his consequent reliability as a witness to events in the life of his employer. Scholars, he continued, dispute the contents of the book because it was not properly documented and it contains many later interpolations. I asked him to explain what he meant, and he replied that with old books and manuscripts scribes would often include their own material as they copied texts.

I asked the group to tell me about Advaita himself. Mr. Mukherjee first stressed Advaita's role as the cause of Caitanya's advent, then mentioned that Advaita's gurus introduced the worship of the divine couple as a unit. Finally he discussed the active role of women in the early years of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. He pointedly stated that in Europe at the time no women held positions comparable to Sītā Devī's. He attributed the occasional rise of female leadership among the Gauḍīyas to Caitanya's teaching that there are no real differences between people (referring, apparently, to both gender and caste) and that divine love is the goal of life.

Mr. Datta said that each of the writers of hagiographies about Advaita expressed his own opinions. When pressed about whether any told the story more accurately than the others, he replied "we have no way of knowing." But clearly he was not very concerned about which of the several texts was correct; for him it was important that so many existed to honor Advaita. These scholars of their own religious traditions seemed to have no more interest than an academic in establishing the accuracy of one account and the error of all the others. Rather they viewed each text as its author's paean to Advaita Ācārya, testimonies to the devotion of their creators.

Mr. Mukherjee told me that Caitanya had instructed Advaita to give the image he had worshipped, and the responsibility for it, to his second son, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, and to give his accumulated wealth to the fourth son, Balarāma. These were the only two sons who married, and one must be married to inherit, he said. The one whose responsibility it was to carry on the worship had to be a poor man, he continued, so that all his attention would be on his religious duties. Balarāma wanted to share both the wealth and the worship, but was not allowed to do so, so later he had another image established for his family's wor-

ship. The AP account of this transfer of power does not attribute it to Caitanya, and none of the other hagiographies mentions it at all. Their silence on the issue does not necessarily mean that the transfer did not happen in this way. Perhaps the hagiographers ignore it because it confers agency for it not to their leader Advaita but to Caitanya. Or the account may simply be local legend.

The Shantipur devotees seem to take the conservative view that Advaita's role was to herald in Caitanya and not that he was greater or more fully divine than Caitanya. Mr. Mukherjee also told me that Sītā never wanted Advaita to be seen as greater than Caitanya and fought against this tendency in his devotees after her husband's death. Some of the texts suggest that this was an issue for the community, the source of some division amongst Advaita's sons.

In speaking of Advaita's theological identity, both Mr. Datta and Mr. Mukherjee wanted me to understand that Advaita was Śiva himself, and that Śiva was a devotee of Kṛṣṇa who had chosen to incarnate at this time because he had been excluded from the *rāsa līlā* in Vraja and still wanted to experience that intimacy with Kṛṣṇa. When asked about the stories describing Advaita as Mahāviṣṇu, they said that Mahāviṣṇu is Śiva! That revelation was startling, but they would not elaborate on it.

On a subsequent visit, some months later, Mr. Mukherjee had arranged to help me gather materials that would be useful for my study and had compiled a bibliography for me. We began at Baḍa Gosvāmī Pāḍā, in whose library Mr. Mukherjee had thought we might find some useful manuscripts or books. Unfortunately their only relevant holding was a published copy of the *Advaita Prakāśa*.

The next day I visited Mr. Subal Candra Maitra, a local scholar and gentleman farmer who had written a slim volume on Advaita Ācārya. He had arranged a large display on Advaita for me to see, including several images and paintings, and had arranged a program of *kīrtana*. Interestingly, none of the songs appeared to highlight Advaita in any way. He showed me a manuscript of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and a few of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, all in very good condition, well preserved and carefully wrapped in plastic, but no manuscripts of any texts pertaining to Advaita Ācārya. He also opened his library to me and generously presented me with copies of several articles he had written.

Another gentleman present, Mr. Nityānanda Gosvāmī (whom I assumed to be another descendant of Advaita), mentioned a Sanskrit book called *Advaita Bhāgavata;* I had not heard of it before, nor did I find a copy of it anywhere during my two years of field work. Perhaps it is a work modeled on the *Caitanya Bhāgavata*, produced and given very limited circulation.

Several of the Shantipur scholar-devotees told me that the only authentic biography of Advaita Ācārya is the *Advaita Vilāsa*, and Kālīkṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭācārya,

writing in 1937, says that this text is the "most important" among the modern biographies of Advaita.[4] This was an intriguing assertion. They could not have been referring to the unpublished text, which is extant in two incomplete and undated manuscripts, but to the 1899 work by Vireśvara Pramāṇika. That latter work is, as Pramāṇika tells us in his preface, a compilation of material from the AM, the AP, and the BLS. And yet none of the Shantipur scholars accepts all of those source texts as authentic! Several of them, separately, told me that Pramāṇika had "corrected the errors" made by the earlier biographers and "regularized" the discrepancies among the various other works. No one offered any explanations of how Pramāṇika had ascertained where the errors lay or how they should be corrected. Pramāṇika's text appeared around the same time as many of the Advaita Ācārya hagiographies were discovered, but Pramāṇika states quite clearly that it is his own work, excerpted from the other texts, and makes no claims about an earlier date of composition.

The Shantipur group as a whole is very conservative, and all who spoke to me see Advaita Ācārya very firmly in the "John the Baptist" role (and several used that expression), responsible for Caitanya's incarnation. When I mentioned that some of Advaita's hagiographers described Advaita as the incarnation for the age, they consistently reacted with shock. Yet several insisted that the *Advaita Maṅgala,* which propounds this view, is an authoritative text. This apparent contradiction made me wonder what "authoritative" means here. Mr. Mukherjee, for example, repeatedly told me that Sītā Devī urged her sons and others not to regard Advaita as divine.

Later, I asked Manjulika-di why the texts refer to Advaita as both Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva. She said "that's just our way of indicating someone is a very great man;" in other words, "We say that about any exceptional person." She feels this is a literary convention, a rhetorical stratagem, and not to be understood as literal.

And the last to speak, Pūrṇendunātha Nātha, waited until the others had left the room and then told me he thought the very idea of divine incarnation is superstition and he wanted me to know that he is an atheist and a Marxist. And yet he, too, has published scholarly material on the region and some of its favorite sons.[5]

Religion is often a very public business in India. On festival days temple officials arrange for elaborate processions through the town. These are the rare occasions when the images are taken out of the temples and put on very public display. Among the Shantipur Gosvāmīs these occasions are Advaita Ācārya's birthday and the *rāsa līlā.* Community members work for days in advance of each occasion to construct and decorate the howdah that will carry Advaita and arrange for the "muscle men" who will carry it through the town, using long poles they place on their shoulders. The howdah itself is white, decorated with

strings of yellow marigolds and white tuberoses, punctuated at regular intervals with red roses.

In the fall of 1993 Manjulika-di invited me to visit to observe the *rāsa līlā* festival. Shantipur celebrates this occasion quite differently than I had seen in Vṛndāvana, where troupes of male actors beautifully costumed enact the trysts of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In Shantipur the emphasis is placed on Rādhā and her role in the activities. A young girl is selected from the brahman community to be adorned and worshipped as Rādhā. She should be pre-pubescent, although in 1993 the girl was of high school age (something the elders bemoaned).

The women of the community (and "community" here refers to each temple precinct, and Advaita's lineage has several) spent the afternoon preparing the girl for her part, instructing her, dressing her, and applying the complicated makeup on her face. When they had completed their work, she looked like a bride, clad in gold-embroidered red silk with a crown on her head, bridal makeup, flower garlands, and much gold jewelry.

Meanwhile the men were supervising the finishing touches to the several howdahs that would be used to carry "Rādhā" and the temple deities in procession throughout the town all night long. Each howdah was magnificently decorated, some with lights. A few simple parade floats were also lining up in the temple yard, holding such items as a life-sized figure of Advaita as a young man or scenes from the lives of Advaita and Caitanya. Larger floats would hold *kīrtana* parties.

When the designated moment arrived, the deities Madana Mohana, Rādhā, Advaita Ācārya, and Sītā Devī were placed on their thrones in their respective howdas and the young girl was similarly seated on hers. Each howdah would be carried by four to eight "muscle men" throughout the night, and these men would be fortified by food prepared by the women of the temple precinct and also by generous draughts of *bhāṅg* to keep up their enthusiasm for the important task.

Throughout the town viewing areas had been set up. Each was a well-lighted pavilion. Devotional singing would alternate with readings from texts treating Advaita Ācārya and Caitanya. Whole families would come and spend the night under the shelter of these tents, the children simply dropping off to sleep next to their parents on the blankets spread on the ground.

And so the parades would continue through the streets of the town until sunrise, cheered all along their routes by the enthusiastic crowds gathered to see them. The sight of a deity confers much merit, or good karma, and on this night people could catch sight of several deities, many times each.

My last visit to Shantipur occurred on the seventh day in the lunar month of Māgha (January 31 in the year 2001), when the Goswamis of Shantipur cel-

ebrated the birthday of their ancestor and lineage founder. On his birthday devotees awaken Advaita at the usual early morning hour, see to his morning ablutions and breakfast, and perform the morning prayers. Meanwhile people are gathering in the *maṇḍapa* to sing the devotional songs known as *kīrtana*, most of which praise Kṛṣṇa and some of which extol the virtues of his sixteenth-century embodiment, Caitanya. Interestingly, very few songs even mention Advaita Ācārya. The one notable exception is the song in praise of the *pañcatattva*, the five essentials, the founding fathers of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism:

> Jaya Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya
> Prabhu Nityānanda
> Jaya Advaita, Gadādhāra
> Śrī Vāsādī Gaurabhaktavṛṃdā
>
> [Victory to the Glorious Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, to Lord Nityānanda,
> victory to Advaita and Gadādhāra, and to the glorious Śrīnivāsa
> and Gaura's other disciples.]

Interspersed with the singing are readings from passages in the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* that treat Caitanya's relationship with Advaita and the occasional passage from the *Advaita Prakāśa.*

While all this celebration is going on, in another area of the temple precincts, in an area covered with a makeshift canvas ceiling, women are peeling and chopping mountains of potatoes, cabbages, and other vegetables in preparation for the feast to come. And near the women are the men cooking, stirring their enormous pots of rice and vegetables with huge poles. They will work all morning long so that the hungry congregation will have sustenance when they return from their procession through the town in the early afternoon. If asked, they will say they are cooking for Advaita Prabhu and that the rest of us will merely be fed his leftovers, the *prasāda*, or grace, that he bestows on his followers.

At the proper moment the head priest (the eldest male member of the family) and the other priests ceremoniously enter the temple and bring the image of Advaita outside. The head priest carries Advaita above his head around the courtyard, to the accompaniment of the ululation of the women, so that everyone can greet him. After this circumambulation Advaita is placed in his howdah, on white silk and cushions, and prepared for the trip through Shantipur. Drummers and the strongest (male) singers, playing the small hand cymbals known as *kartālas*, immediately precede the howdah, and everyone else who wants to participate falls in behind. After some discussion amongst the musicians and priests, the route is determined, and the procession sets out. The winter sun-

shine invigorates the crowd and from time to time the women spontaneously cry out their ululation, raising their hands over their heads and dancing as they proceed. They march out of Madana Gopāla Jīū to the main road, past the Girls' College and the statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose,[6] and then through the neighborhoods of the town. Residents come out of their houses onto their verandahs for the chance to see Advaita, and the women in the parade toss sweets to the children. Clearly this is an important local event, as the streets are thickly lined with spectators (and a few impatient bicyclists, waiting for the procession to pass so that they can continue on their way). Now and then the group leaders consult yet again, modifying the route plan as they feel necessary.

Most of the participants in the procession are women, nearly all are married, and range in age from late teens on up. Several women, dressed in the traditional white saris of widows, appear to be quite elderly, but seem to have as much energy to praise their lord as any of their marching companions and have no trouble keeping up with the group. Several of the men are carrying small children.

At first no one speaks to the foreigner with the camera, who seems to be photographing everything in sight. Then one of the priests checks to make sure she is enjoying the activity, and suddenly all the nearby women, delighted to discover the foreign woman speaks their language, are full of conversation. The earthquake across the country in the state of Gujarat two weeks earlier is still very much on everyone's minds, and we share our concern for its survivors.

We wend our way back to Madana Gopāla Pāḍā for lunch. A small group of teenaged women joins me and we admire each other's bangles. I ask them about their lives and congratulate them on their plans to continue their educations into college.

For all these people Advaita Ācārya is very important, and yet the hagiographies treating him are of little interest. What then can we say about these texts and this small town where their subject spent most of his life? The Shantipur Goswamis are in many respects conservative with regard to their religion and its practice. That is not unexpected. But in terms of their everyday lives we may be surprised. Women are no longer kept secluded and ride their bicycles quite freely around town. Most middle- and upper-class women are educated, as are increasing numbers of girls from poorer families. I was even admitted to the kitchens in the Gosvāmī households, where rules of purity and pollution normally adhere particularly. Only on festival days were the caste restrictions upheld, though never did I see a nonbrahman made to feel unwanted or transgressive. The temple images continue to be treated respectfully, like much-loved elder family members. Advaita's descendants do not hold themselves aloof from the rest of the community.

What about the Sylhet branch of Advaita's lineage?

Professor Bijit Kumar De, principle of MC (Murari Chand) College and secretary of the Sylhet Ramakrishna Mission, and Professor Pranab Kumar Sinha met me at the Sylhet airport on April 17, 1994, and took me to "Bijit-ālaya," Professor De's extended family home of nearly fifty people. The house is the size of a small hotel, and I was very well looked after, particularly by the women in the family. I planned to work with some manuscripts housed in the Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat and to visit Advaita's birthplace of Navagrāma, near the town of Sunāmgañj.

The December 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid in the town of Ayodhya, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, had repercussions even in Bangladesh. In Sylhet the living quarters of the monks at the Ramakrishna Mission (an institute known for promoting religious harmony) were completely destroyed and the Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat was burned, with all its holdings. The library had once held a manuscript of the *Sītā Caritra* (No. 263), an incomplete manuscript of the *Advaita Tattva* (No. 251), and, remotely possibly, one of the *Bālya Līlā Sūtra.* Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi had personally collected about 146 of the manuscripts in the library, according to Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee.[7] The collection there had been quite impressive and included pieces copies of which were not housed elsewhere in either Bangladesh or India.

Unfortunately the destruction did not stop there. In Sylhet most Hindus' homes were attacked. One of the leaders of this violence had been a student of Professor De at M. C. (Murari Chand) College, and the two had a close relationship. Positioning himself conspicuously on the roof, that student saw to it that the De household remained untouched, but during that period the entire family remained indoors with all the doors and windows locked tightly.

Despite all the difficulties they had quite recently faced, everyone I met during my visit—scholars, monastics, and lay people—remained quietly determined to go on about their lives and remain in the places where their families had always lived. For all of those people, few of whom have any personal connection to him, Advaita Ācārya is a revered and much-loved son of the region. One of the local scholars, Kṛṣṇakumar Pal Chaudhury, for example, who had been told of my visit to the region, generously allowed me to see his collection of old paintings, most of which featured Advaita Ācārya.

One evening during my visit we drove about fourteen miles southeast of Sylhet to the site of Dhaka-Dakṣina, to Caitanya's grandmother's house and an old temple, both of which buildings are reputed to be about five hundred years old. The brick of both buildings is now crumbling, but one can see that the house was originally built in the standard Bengali design with an interior courtyard. To reach the house one climbs a long, steep flight of stairs carved into the hillside.

Unfortunately this pilgrimage site, too, had been attacked in the recent communal violence.

The culmination of my visit to the region was the pilgrimage to Navagrāma, birthplace of Advaita. That day began a few hours before dawn with a magnificent Bengali *kāla baiśākhi*—the ferocious thunderstorms that precede the monsoon season. As the sun rose I still could not tell if our journey would have to be aborted, but decided to proceed as if nothing had changed and began to prepare myself. Eventually, around seven o'clock, signs of life began to manifest throughout the house. Tea and toast arrived, along with the news that we would set out shortly. Bijit-babu,[8] Pranab-babu, two adolescents, one two year old, and the driver and I set off in a small car designed to hold four people. Fortunately I had been given a window seat. Once we cleared the city limits the terrain opened up to reveal rice paddies as far as the eye could see, with their beautiful green color that exists nowhere else in nature. In the far distance we could see the mountains of Meghalaya in India.

A few hours later we had covered the forty miles to Sunāmgañj and arrived at the home of Dr. Dhirendra Choudhury and his family. A committee of local Hindu scholars, all of whom were well-acquainted with Advaita Ācārya, welcomed us there. Mr. Dipak Ranjan Das, a teacher at the Bool Chand High School in Sunāmgañj, was himself in the midst of preparing a book on Advaita Ācārya. Mr. Das knows the local history very well and was kind enough to have written a few notes for me in longhand. As we all sat down together, Mr. Das opened the conversation by asking what I wanted to know about Advaita. We discussed the questions presented by the range of views of Advaita Ācārya found in the hagiographies, and Mr. Das suggested that it might be possible to find some historical records to see whether Divyasiṁha's name appeared anywhere outside of sectarian sources. Unfortunately such a search proved unfruitful.

No roads reach into the area around Navagrāma, and the usual way to get there is on a small "country boat," and the twenty-mile ride takes about six hours. Dr. Choudhury had arranged for a speed boat to transport us to Navagrāma. With that motor boat we would be there in about two hours. While we were making our plans, Mrs. Choudhury and her friends had been busy in the kitchen and set a sumptuous meal before us.

Mrs. Choudhury bundled us back into the car with food hampers (Pranab-bābu announced that he was the "Minister of Food" for our pilgrimage trip), and sent us to the boat dock. We had to climb down a fairly steep rock slope to the boat. It must be treacherously slick when wet, but we had no trouble. Our boat was a small two-seated motor boat with a windscreen, with plenty of room for all six of us, including our pilot. The sky remained overcast but we had no more rain, and the trip was delightful. We passed all kinds of Bengali riverboats,

from the small canoelike boats, to larger ones covered to provide sheltered living space for families, to commercial boats and ferries. Along the river bank we saw small villages of mud and cowdung huts covered with neatly woven grass mats. Children played in the river, women bathed and washed clothes and dishes. Everyone was quite curious about our expedition. After all, I may be the only foreigner many of them will ever see in person.

After about two hours we arrived at a place where we could land safely, on a lovely sandy beach beneath the mountains where the river was full of fishing boats. Asking directions all along the way, we set out across the sand and soon reached a bamboo jungle and eventually a string of tiny villages. All the local children came running to join us. From there we walked another mile and a half or so and came to a ramshackle temple, covered in corrugated tin. According to Mr. Das, a "local respectable gentleman" had built the temple in 1924 and engaged a brahman priest to perform the daily rituals. Some thirty years later bandits looted the temple and injured the priest, and since then it had not been tended regularly. In 1979 Mr. Das and the late Rakesh Chandra Shome launched an attempt to revive the temple with the construction of a *Bhog Mandir* for preparing and serving food and a guest house nearby. The work was complete within a year, and Dr. Mahanambrata, a renowed Vaiṣṇava scholar, participated in the opening ceremonies. Five years later, however, the temple was washed away by the Paṇatīrtha River in flood, but the local people had somehow retrieved it and continue to worship the images there.

When we arrived the current priest was summoned. He opened the temple for us, and we were pleased to find three beautifully tended, typically Bengali-style wooden images of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and one, twice as large, of Advaita Prabhu.

The priest told us that Advaita's birthplace was about half a mile further up the path. He said there was nothing left there but that everyone knew the place, and so we set off, barefoot, as one must on pilgrimage. Two elderly brahmans, clad in sparklingly white *dhotis*, led the way, and all the village children joined us. The path was well worn, narrow, and dusty enough to be quite soft underfoot. We walked through more small settlements and then emerged from the jungle onto beach. The old men announced that this was where Navagrāma had been in Advaita's childhood. Evidently the village had been divided by the river at one point and then was eventually completely washed away. The older of the two priests announced he would show me the very place where Lābhā and Kubera's house had once stood and ran out onto the sand of the nearly dry riverbed. Suddenly he stopped, turned to face me, and started dancing, arms upraised, in the typical Vaiṣṇava posture.

We returned to the temple, and by now an even larger group had congregated, including several elderly Vaiṣṇava widows. We tried to talk, but Sylheti Bānglā is

phonologically quite different from my Calcutta Standard and even from Dhaka Standard, and I could not understand them. Bijit-bābu translated their questions into Dhaka Standard, and my responses into Sylheti Bānglā, and so we managed, exchanging small talk about our respective families and the like.

One of the priests took us to his house in the village and proudly introduced his daughter to us. She was a college student in Sunāmgañj. We spent some time with his family talking about my quest and enjoying their hospitality. And then we returned to the riverbank to our boat for the return trip to Sunāmgañj.

In urban Bangladesh Advaita has all but disappeared. Yet in the remote villages of Rājāgāon and Navagrāma he lives on, and the small temple dedicated to him remains active. Similarly his descendants in Shantipur continue to commemorate his life and teachings and to include him in the celebrations throughout the ritual year. They are aware of the hagiographical material he has inspired and may draw from some of it on ceremonial occasions. Praxis, however, outweighs text for both communities, and temple service remains primary.

9

Conclusions

ALTHOUGH HAGIOGRAPHICAL PRODUCTION IN ASIA predates similar Christian literature, the formal study of religious biography began in Europe with the Bollandists, a Belgian Jesuit group. The Bollandists sought to collate and organize Catholic material on the lives of their saints. In 1603 Heribert Rosweyde asked and received permission to study the numerous lives of saints[1] he had noticed in his own and other monastic libraries.[2] This eventually led to the collation and publication of lives of Catholic saints, something that prior to this no one had tried to do in such a systematic manner. Rosweyde died in 1629, and his brother monk John Bollandus took up his work. Soon others, too, became involved. They tried to order the materials chronologically, "fix" any errors they found, and provide helpful commentary to the lives.[3] The Jesuit community quickly recognized this as important work and assigned more resources, human and otherwise, to the *Acta Sanctorum* project.[4] This institutional commitment allowed the group to gather hagiographical material quite widely. The vast majority of works were in Latin (over nine thousand), with significant numbers also in Greek (nineteen hundred) and so-called Oriental languages (e.g. Syrian, with roughly twelve hundred).[5] What had now become a hagiographical society eventually took Bollandus's name, though he had actually worked on only eight volumes of the *Acta Sanctorum*.[6]

Formal study of hagiography, outside sectarian boundaries, in the Western academy began about a hundred years ago and took a related but distinctive direction when some European and American scholars began to attempt to use what they considered objective research methods to sort historical fact from exaggeration and "pious fabrication"[7] in the accounts of the life of Jesus presented in the Gospels. They believed that these stories were not necessarily true, in the literal sense, but soon realized that they would never be able to completely sort fact from purposeful fabrication.

Meanwhile the Bollandists had a new leader with an academic turn of mind: Hippolyte Delehaye (1859–1941) took over the leadership of the society in 1912. Delehaye established an approach to hagiography that relied on text criticism and archaeology, working to meld these scientific areas with his strong Catholic faith. Under his guidance the Bollandists began to examine all extant versions of a given life and discussed the variant readings, and their significance, in detail.[8]

The scholars in these two related streams, that is, the Catholic tradition of scholarship on the saints and the more academic work of interpreting the historical Jesus, were using similar methodologies. Scholars both within and without the Catholic church began to consider sacred biography as separate from but including elements of both historical biography and mythology. This shift of thought allowed scholars to regard such works as a legitimate mode of religious expression, while at the same time seeing them as comprising a discrete genre within the larger literary context. Now sacred biography could be studied as literature, no longer to be approached the way that scholars had done when they believed it to be an imperfect form of biography. They abandoned the attempt to extract empirical (i.e., historical) truth from often complex narratives. Now that the pattern had been defined, the Gospels could be studied with other works of this type produced by other religious traditions, using the more sophisticated approach of form criticism. That is, they could be examined straightforwardly as examples of the hagiographical genre. This meant then that scholars could take a step back from the question of the messages the Gospels might convey to their believers and could begin to look at extratheological issues the texts presented to see how the materials compared with lives of other important religious figures in other traditions. Western scholars began now to examine larger issues than those dealing simply with the facts of the life of one man.

Those issues include the circumstances (political, sociological, religious, etc.) of both an author and his or her community and how those circumstances may influence the choices the author makes in constructing a text. Martin Dibelius, working with Christianity, and Joachim Wach, considering founders of several religious traditions, were perhaps the first to observe that the religious community itself plays a great role in the construction of the biographical image of its founder. Thomas J. Hefferman claims that "the sacred biographer's primary mission in writing the life is not to render a chronological record of the subject's life—but rather to facilitate the growth of the cult."[9]

The earlier scholars were interested in Christian hagiography, but their methodology and work have been influential elsewhere as well; scholars working with other religious traditions have been able to take advantage of the methodology and realizations these earlier academics had developed. Most who have

worked with hagiography, regardless of its geographic and cultural origins, have noticed commonalities in these materials. By now a great deal of Asian religious biography has come under scholarly scrutiny, though we have undoubtedly only begun to realize how vast these corpora may be, and much work remains to be done. With many religious traditions the hagiographical material comprises all that is known about the people it describes. Rarely is there any extrasectarian literature, or public record, to substantiate the claims we find in the hagiographies. We cannot, then, declare these works to be pure fabrication, nor can we call them historical documents. They are neither, and yet also to some degree both, as they function in a murky gray realm in which both operate to different degrees at different points in the narratives. We must therefore learn to read between the lines, to read what is not said as well as what is said, to be alert to metaphorical consistency in the portrayals of the protagonists, and to understand that any author is presenting us with the image he or she wants us to see of a given subject.

The Advaita Ācārya Corpus

How did the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas understand Advaita Ācārya and his position among them? His most important function, in the eyes of the larger community, was as the instrumental agent responsible for the advent of Kṛṣṇa as Caitanya in Nadīyā in the late fifteenth century. For members of his own school Advaita's image of respectability is even more central as they will begin to describe themselves as the only group to maintain the high standards of praxis and morality common in Caitanya's day but eventually lost. How then do the various factions among the Gauḍīyas handle these hagiographical materials?

While the Gauḍīyas glorify those they favor by borrowing from their works, they also condemn others by ignoring them. But is it likely for none of the Advaita hagiographers—whose subject was responsible for their entire movement—to have found any favor with any of the theologians or with Caitanya's own hagiographers? How can this be? The colophons of most of the Advaita materials indicate very early dates of composition, suggesting that these pieces were extant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Vaiṣṇava writers were at their most prolific.

Or were they? While the *Advaita Maṅgala*, extant today in a number of manuscripts, does appear to be a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century composition, the provenance of the other two major works treating Advaita, and one treating his primary wife Sītā Devī, is intriguing. All three were discovered some distance to the east of the Navadvīpa-Shantipur Vaiṣṇava community, in what is

now the Sylhet District of Bangladesh, homeland of Caitanya's parents and land of Advaita's birth. The scholar who brought them to public attention, Acyutacaraṇa Tattvanidhi Caudhurī, was a scholar and champion of Sylhet regional history and literature, himself a very prolific writer, whose family were members of Advaita's lineage of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Like many Bengali scholars of the early twentieth century,[10] he seems to have spent a great deal of time combing the countryside for old manuscripts. Many elite Bengalis had become interested in demonstrating the value of their own literary tradition and were beginning to collect and write about their own intellectual history. The Asiatic Society had been formed to preserve and collect Sanskrit manuscripts, and the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat soon adopted the corollary mission of collecting and preserving Bengali manuscripts. As word spread and traveling collectors moved out across the countryside, people began bringing their families' manuscripts to the organization for conservation in the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat library. Acyutacaraṇa had also developed such a reputation for his interest in regional history that people began bringing their family literary treasures to him. Among these were some of the hitherto unknown texts treating Advaita Ācārya.

By the time Acyutacaraṇa began his career, in the late nineteenth century, Advaita's lineage had shrunk tremendously. Even during Caitanya's lifetime, Nityānanda's followers far outnumbered those of Advaita. But Advaita had always occupied a central position in the Gauḍīya hierarchy and was always recognized in the same breath as Caitanya and Nityānanda in the major literary works to come out of the larger school. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja, author of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* (CC), devotes an entire chapter (1.6) exclusively to Advaita, and a second (1.12) to his immediate followers and gives him frequent mention throughout the voluminous text. Advaita's chapter in the CC immediately follows the one devoted to Nityānanda (1.5). Nityānanda was slightly older than Caitanya and constituted the third part of the ruling triumvirate in the early days of the new movement. He is described as something of a wild man whose devotion impelled him to behave in an unrestrained manner not always socially sanctioned. Nityānanda and Advaita had radically different views on how best to propound Caitanya's teachings. Advaita was ever the stalwart of brahmanical purity and Nityānanda took every possible opportunity to shatter caste restrictions. Reading a cross-section of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts leads one to conclude that Advaita and Nityānanda probably never enjoyed a harmonious relationship and that they and their followers disagreed on many occasions. Advaita, the representative of the old guard of mainstream brahmanism, was undoubtedly the least charismatic of the three. And yet the young movement had desperately needed him to link them to legitimacy and provide them with respectability in the eyes of society at large. Advaita's reputation

as a careful scholar was also important to the new movement. At the same time Caitanya decried what he considered "dry scholarship" as not conducive to liberation, advocating instead the cultivation of a personal, emotional relationship with the divine. Advaita's reputation would prove useful a second time in the late nineteenth century when the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community as a whole had developed a reputation for scandalous behavior. Advaita Ācārya would again be used as the standard-bearer of propriety and legitimacy as well as the social purity one would expect of that very high-caste brahman and his descendants.

Into this tumultuous environment a tenth-generation descendant of Advaita Ācārya rose to prominence. Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī (1844–1899) could trace his ancestry back to Advaita's fourth son Balarāma, the son who inherited his father's worldly goods and had married and raised a large family. (Gosvāmī, usually spelled *Goswami* in English, is a family name in this lineage rather than a monastic title.) We can say with greater certainty about Vijaya Kṛṣṇa than we can about his grandsire, because of the greater degree of reliable secondary documentation, that his intellectual and religious journey took him through a variety of spiritual environments. He spent years with the Brahmo Samāja and, at least for a time, took monism very seriously. He turned his back on the strictures of caste and worked for the upliftment of his countrymen and women. Eventually Vijaya Kṛṣṇa returned to his devotional origins, spending his last years engaged in what we would term social work, fighting poverty, all the while worshipping Kṛṣṇa. During this last phase of his life, and particularly during the time he spent in Bāblā, his many followers identified him as Caitanya returned, and sometimes even as the triple embodiment of Caitanya, Nityānanda, and Advaita Ācārya. Thus at a time when many Bengali intellectuals were trying to reformulate their various religions, often in response to outside criticism, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa first joined one such reform movement and then returned to his family's Vaiṣṇava practices. Because he was born in a prominent family, he automatically attracted public attention, and his apparently charismatic personality brought him acclaim and devotion throughout his life. While Acyutacaraṇa, another member of Advaita's family (spiritually if not genetically), worked on the literary and intellectual fronts, Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī worked actively in the religious world to bring public attention to the Gauḍīya movement and its illustrious herald. The two had overlapping but largely separate audiences.

Let us turn now to the issue of when the texts of the Advaita hagiographical corpus were actually composed, in light of what we now know about the history of his lineage and his community, and why.

Relative Chronology of the Advaita Ācārya Corpus

All the material on Advaita Ācārya has been difficult to date. The colophons of most of these texts do contain dates, but some scholars have questioned the reliability of these dates. Their most compelling reasons for doing so are the aforementioned absence of any reference to these materials in other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts and the sudden appearance of three of the previously unknown compositions at the end of the last century.

While much of the Advaita Ācārya material is self-referential, it is not mentioned in any other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava texts, except the also controversial *Prema Vilāsa*, whose twenty-fourth chapter mentions both the *Bālya Līlā Sūtra* (BLS) and the *Advaita Prakāśa* (AP). The Advaita material, on the other hand, draws from the literature of the larger tradition quite liberally. Thus we know which texts were written earlier than some of the Advaita materials but have little other evidence for the dates of composition of the Advaita corpus.

Several approaches can be used to attempt to establish dates of composition of texts. The physical evidence of a manuscript itself can be examined for indications of age, and the language of the text can be analyzed for dating clues. Materials from outside the tradition can be searched for verification of events and characters described. External evidence may provide even more information. Other texts produced by the school under study can be checked for references to the target text and material about its author. Similarly, the target text can be read for references to other texts in the tradition. We can look for theological anachronisms.

We begin with the question of language. The grammar of the Middle Bengali of the AM, the AP, and the SC appears to be consistent with the grammar of the language of the late sixteenth century, but not exclusively so, as many of the forms found in the texts can also be found in modern literary Bengali. A good modern scholar of Bengali could certainly reproduce the earlier forms of the language in his or her own compositions. Conversely, scribes have been known to "correct" texts as they copied them. And because Bengali weather precludes manuscript longevity, the necessary frequent hand copying provides many opportunities for literate scribes to alter texts to conform to the language and theology current in their own time (possibly quite innocently believing they are correcting an author's ungrammatical Bengali). Such corrections made in the course of transmission, like the textual accretions discussed in an earlier chapter, are not felt to "ruin" the original author's creation.

Language, then, is not a useful criterion by which to establish the date of composition of a text. Without the presence in the texts of such linguistic anachro-

nisms as "borrowings" from a language whose presence in the area can be clearly dated,[11] equally strong cases can be made on linguistic grounds for both early and recent dates of composition of the texts in question. While the philologists may enjoy this kind of close textual work, language will always be a red herring in terms of dating texts.

The colophon of the BLS purports that the text was written in 1487, a date which, if accurate, would make the BLS the first of the Vaiṣṇava literary biographies. But colophons and preambles, which often contain dates, are the easiest sections of texts to alter because of their physical positions within the documents. Therefore the testimony of these portions is routinely greeted with skepticism. The list of individuals celebrated in an invocation, for example, often varies in different manuscripts of a given text and can reflect the allegiances of the scribe or his employer as much as those of the original author. The numerous references in the BLS to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, born in 1486, who adopted that name in his early twenties, further confirm our speculation that the 1487 date of composition is unlikely to be accurate.

For example, the second and third verses of the first chapter read as follows:

> I praise the glorious Gaura-Gopāla, that ocean of divine love, whose greatness is beautifully described in the book (called) *Ananta Saṁhitā*, who descended into Śacī's womb from Purandara in Navadvīpa, drawn to liberation while still alive just by my lord's perfect mantra.

These verses might at first glance seem to refer to Caitanya ("Gaura-Gopāla," born in 1486), whose glories could not yet have been fully realized by those around him in 1487. However, according to the biographies of Caitanya as well as purportedly later biographies of Advaita Ācārya, Advaita had devoted much of his life to prayer and austerities aimed at bringing Kṛṣṇa to earth. Because the tradition understands Advaita as the instrumental cause of Caitanya's (i.e., Kṛṣṇa's) advent, his early awareness of Kṛṣṇa's arrival as the infant in Navadvīpa is consistent with the narrative structure of the text, although it strains scholarly credulity.

We are forced to conclude that the texts of the Advaita Ācārya corpus cannot be dated based on their language, or on the physical evidence of the manuscripts (because too few exist, and most of those are relatively recent), or on the basis of mention of them in other texts.

In fact, working with manuscripts in South Asia poses a number of challenges to the scholar. Fortunately, Jatindra Mohan Bhattacharjee produced a nearly exhaustive catalogue of Bengali manuscripts.[12] Assembling this catalogue entailed a great deal of work and travel throughout the Bengali-speaking world,

over most of J. M. Bhattacharjee's productive life. His catalogue is as accurate as such a compendium can possibly be. A scholar who hopes to examine any of the materials he catalogued can then visit the appropriate library and request permission to do so. These manuscript collections are always closed to casual browsers, so special permission is required to see their contents. Letters of recommendation from reputable mentors known to the manuscript custodians often help, but, even so, one will usually be sent to the highest local authority before a librarian will permit access to materials. The quest for official permission may take days or weeks or even months. One may be sent to the librarian's immediate supervisor or to as lofty a figure as the vice chancellor of the university where the manuscript is housed.

In seeking such permission, one must ask precisely for whatever one hopes to do. On one foray I asked, in writing, for permission to read and study two particular manuscripts but neglected to ask to be allowed to take notes, and so I was not allowed to take out my notebook and pencils while in the manuscript room. Permission to photograph or photocopy entire manuscripts is rarely granted, though one can usually manage to copy them out by hand, and occasionally one may photograph a few folios of a piece. But all of that is only relevant when the desired manuscript is available. Many pieces that Bhattacharjee found are no longer extant. Others have been misfiled and cannot be found (sometimes even when one was working with them only the day before!), and occasionally a curator's newspaper and cup of tea are more compelling than the interests of scholars.

Once a kind librarian has provided the scholar with her desired manuscript, and the scholar has found a seat at the table in the reading room, the work can begin. With the ceiling fans whirling overhead, one quickly ascertains the purpose of the hand-sized rocks scattered over the table. In university libraries a crowd often gathers, as amazed to see anyone wearing gloves (to protect a delicate manuscript from further damage from the natural oils in one's hands) as, sadly, to discover that foreigners find their literature worth reading. Rarely are there the financial resources necessary to provide climate-controlled storage for any library materials, an unfortunate reality that contributes further to their deterioration. Recent attempts by such entitites as the National Library in Kolkata, the South Asian Microforms Project in the U.S. as well as projects mounted by the Australian National Library and other agencies to provide training and equipment for microfilming of these materials are beginning to improve preservation. Much of India's literary past has yet to see the light of publication, and so the loss of these manuscript materials is a true loss of large portions of Indian literary history. On the one hand, those materials that have gained widespread importance have usually been published and exist in multiple manuscript cop-

ies. On the other hand, texts that have not become popular exist in very few copies and may never have been published. These latter materials may have been ignored by major religious leaders, but the fact remains that they exist, that they were produced for some reason(s). Their very existence then forces us to try to ascertain why they were created. Because they are extant in few, sometimes sole, exemplars, interested scholars may face difficulties in locating these pieces and obtaining access to them, and the search may become quite adventurous.

One part of the fieldwork for this book, for example, led me to the town of Barddhaman (Burdwan), a two-hour train journey northwest of Kolkata. Professor Ramakanta Chakrabarty, of the History Department at Burdwan University (now retired), had arranged for Hena Basu (my research assistant) and me to stay at the university's guest house while we sought to find the Barddhamān Sāhitya Sabhā (Barddhaman Literary Society), where Bhattacharjee had reported that two manuscripts of the *Advaita Sūtra Kaḍacā* were housed.

A messenger met us at the rickshaw stand outside the train station. He had been sent to tell us to have lunch in the railroad canteen because no food would be available during the day at the guest house. We returned to the station, ate our lunch, and then set out again for the campus. After we turned off the Grand Trunk Road, we found ourselves in a peaceful verdant setting, and soon saw Professor Chakrabarty waving to us in greeting as our driver cycled past. We later learned that the university had been founded on land granted by the Maharaja of Burdwan under the condition that no trees be cut down. The campus is a beautiful place, and we envied both students and faculty this lovely setting.

We were shown to our room in the guest house, and, after cleaning off the dust of the road, set out in search of the Barddhamān Sāhitya Sabhā. We decided to begin at the Bengali Department of the university. Some thirty years earlier Rabindranath Maiti had published his critical edition of the *Advaita Maṅgala* through this university, and we hoped not only to get some information but also to buy a few copies of that book. (Unlike U.S. publishers, Indian publishers seem to maintain supplies of books they have published, even decades ago, until the books have all been sold.)

After the usual kind hospitality of tea and biscuits (welcome refreshment in the mid afternoon) and some conversation about my quest, we learned that the Barddhamān Sāhitya Sabhā was indeed still in the town of Barddhaman. My heart soared. It was the private collection of the late Professor Sukumar Sen, whose family home was on the Grand Trunk Road, and it used to be open every afternoon. Now, however, only the caretaker lived in the house, and it was kept locked at all times. My heart sank.

Realizing we would be able to accomplish nothing further, we bought our copies of the *Advaita Maṅgala* and decided to return to Kolkata. We caught a

local train and easily found seats in the "ladies' compartment" for the slow trip back to the big city.

Hena suggested that I speak with Dr. Uma Das Gupta, regional director for the Fulbright Program, under whose auspices I was conducting this fieldwork. Fortunately, Uma-di knew the Sen family well and phoned Dr. Subhadra Kumar Sen, son of Professor Sukumar Sen, arranging an appointment for us to meet. After some initial meetings to get acquainted, the whole family, including Mrs. Krishna Sen and their two children, daughter Nupur and son Som, met me one day at the family home in Barddhaman. They had not had the heart to return to the place yet since Sukumar Sen's death, and so their opening the family home to me was an act of even greater kindness and generosity than might be apparent. After a delicious lunch (and Mrs. Sen's cooking is but one of the many joys in my friendship with this family), Bahadur (the caretaker) began bringing manuscripts from the library room for me to examine, in the hopes of finding the pieces I sought. We worked in a hallway open to the interior courtyard to take advantage of the sunlight and skimmed several hundred manuscripts, but to no avail. And that evening I returned, sadly, to Kolkata, by now reconciled to not being able to include those pieces in my study.

Over the next few years I thought often about the contents of the Barddhamān Sāhitya Sabhā, all those manuscripts once so painstakingly collected, that had served as the basis of the scholar's five-volume *Bāṅgālāra Sāhityera Itihāsa.* We knew they had once been catalogued, because the literary survey is generously sprinkled with manuscript numbers and references to this collection. But that catalogue had never been published, and the senior Professor Sen's handlist was nowhere to be found. Perhaps late in life he had entrusted it to one of his senior students, but thus far no one has come forth with it. Further, I was concerned about the safety of the manuscripts themselves, as many we had seen that day were already crumbling, mildewed, or insect-eaten. A few were even stuck together so thoroughly that their folios formed solid "bricks" several inches thick. Fortunately the Sen family shared my concerns and wanted to do whatever we could to restore the collection.

In time, Hena Basu, Susmita Roy, and I managed to recatalogue all these manuscripts, with the advice of Dr. James Nye of the South Asia Microforms Project (SAMP), housed at the University of Chicago. Several years later, with personnel, equipment and funding provided by SAMP, and additional funding from the American Institute of Indian studies, we microfilmed the entire holdings[13] of this manuscript library, and scholars can now work with that microfilm. And, just as filming was about to begin, we located those two long-sought *Advaita Sūtra Kaḍacās*, and Professor Sen kindly allowed me to photograph them for my own use.

Finally, we carefully brushed each manuscript with a very fine paintbrush to remove the years' accumulation of dust, wrapped each one in acid-free paper to which we had pasted a label, and then placed the package thus formed between two cut-to-size pieces of "pieceboard" (a lightweight type of particle board). We wrapped each of these bundles in the traditional bright red cloth and tied it, affixing another label. Sunder Ganeshan of the Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai had advised us that this would be the best and least expensive way to take care of the actual manuscripts. He had found that the color red was not only culturally deemed auspicious but actually seemed to repel destructive insects. Meanwhile the library room in the Barddhaman house had been newly painted, and new bookshelves awaited the cleaned and packaged manuscripts. Thus, at least in this instance, the search for texts important to a study led to a major manuscript preservation project, with international cooperation.

To return to the other Advaita texts, only AM, among the works in this corpus, has escaped scholarly skepticism regarding its date of composition. The oldest extant manuscript of which I am aware, of a corpus of ten manuscripts, purports to have been copied in 1791 from an (undated) earlier exemplar. In his discussion of this text Biman Bihari Majumdar accepts that date and agrees that at the time of his writing (1939) that particular manuscript was about 145 years old. That manuscript is still extant, and, having examined it, I agree with Majumdar's assessment of its age, although two-hundred-year-old manuscripts are quite rare in West Bengal (thanks largely to the aforementioned problems of climate and insects).

The text itself is not dated, and its putative author, Haricaraṇa Dāsa, a disciple of Advaita's eldest son Acyuta, is otherwise unknown (although a "Haricaraṇa" does appear in the list of devotees of Advaita's lineage given in the CC).

J. M. Bhattacharjee cites ten manuscripts of the AM, held in repositories from Bhubaneswar to Kolkata. The number of exemplars far exceeds that of any other single text in the Advaita Ācārya corpus and suggests that the AM was more widely known than the other works, considered by the tradition to have been of some interest, and that it is probably older than either the AP or the SC.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for late dates of composition of the BLS, the AP, and the SC is one that is not raised in the relevant secondary literature. That argument is based on the remarkable coincidence that all three texts were discovered and introduced by Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi. None of these texts is mentioned in any Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literary works outside of the Advaita lineage (except for the aforementioned *Prema Vilāsa*).

The *Advaita Prakāśa*, first introduced in the pages of *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* in 1896 by Acyutacaraṇa, is most probably a late nineteenth century composition. Its author seems to be using the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* as his template, in

terms of his structuring of the text and of the activities he describes. He includes tales of miracles Advaita performed, a complete *Bhārata-parikrama* in Advaita's pilgrimage around India, and stories of encounters with other famous religious leaders. Īśāna also borrows motifs and even stories from other hagiographical material, including, I am startlingly convinced, some Christian material.

An anecdote from chapter 8 of the AP is strongly reminiscent of one told in the Christian New Testament in both Matthew 14:22–33 and Mark 6:45–52 and postulated of Sītā during her childhood.

Īśāna tells us that on one occasion Nṛsiṁha had planned to take his daughters to a special celebration across the Gaṅgā from their home. Just as the family reached the river bank to board the ferry boat, a fierce wind began to blow, forcing up high waves in the river. Nṛsiṁha left his daughters with a servant for safety, and then he got into the boat and crossed the river. But his young daughters were determined to go to the festival and simply walked across the river after him. Some other festival-goers saw them cross and tried to follow them, but fell into the water and nearly drowned.

One can find stories of saints walking on water in many religious traditions, and at first glance it may seem rash to declare this one so certainly a borrowing from the very similar Christian story. However, given the religiopolitical milieu of Bengal at the end of the nineteenth century, with the missionaries striving for conversions, the Bengali intelligentsia asserting its separate regional identity and importance, the concomitant rise of the Indian nationalist movement, and the similarities in the details of the AP account with those of the Mark account, I am quite convinced that this is the case. And my deduction about who actually composed the piece will lend fuel to my argument. As illustrated in this anecdote, the Christian sources then became just one more place from which to draw data to make a theological point.

Provenance of the Advaita Ācārya Corpus

The provenance of the AP, the SC, and the BLS is particularly curious. Possibly anticipating skeptical reactions to the remarkable coincidence of three previously unknown works treating the same figures being found by a single scholar, Acyutacaraṇa writes in his introduction to the BLS that after Advaita's death his then-elderly former household servant Īśāna Dāsa went to Lāuḍa to propound Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and write a book describing Advaita's life at Sītā Devī's request. Īśāna took (apparently the sole exemplar of) the BLS along with him far to the east to use as a reference for details of the early portions of Advaita's life that he himself had not witnessed. Thus, according to Acyutacaraṇa,

the BLS remained hidden in Lāuḍa until it came to his attention at the end of the nineteenth century.

What we know of the *Sītā Caritra* presents quite a different picture of that composition. The *Sītā Caritra* is a text that grew. It remains extant in three undated manuscripts, two in the collection of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat and the third (incomplete) at Pāṭhabāḍī, and in an edition Acyutacaraṇa published in 1926 that I was able to read in the National Library in Kolkata. I was less successful in my efforts to work with the Pāṭhabāḍī text; every time I visited that library, even by prior arrangement, the manuscript curator was "out of station" and had taken the key to the manuscript storage room with him. Fortunately Hena Basu was eventually able to see the text and provide me with her handwritten and typed copies of it. While all three of the manuscripts are undated, they are probably not recent and show signs of age. One of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat manuscripts appears considerably older than the other, but even so, given the short-lived nature of manuscripts in the area, we are not likely to be able to draw any conclusions from them about the age of the text itself.

The published edition of the SC is much longer than the manuscripts and contains quite a bit more material, most of which concerns Īśāna Dāsa. Īśāna is a servant in Advaita's house and has been a part of his family since the age of five; clearly we are to understand that this is the same Īśāna who composed the AP.

The AP is extant only in its several published editions, all identical, and in one quite recent manuscript in the collection of Dhaka University. Its provenance is quite mysterious, and the introductions to each of the published editions (which appeared between 1897 and 1933) give the impression that their writers were anticipating objections to the text's sudden appearance and claim of authenticity. Acyutacaraṇa had published a few articles about the text prior to its publication.

The provenance of a fourth text, the *Sītā Guṇa Kadamba* (SGK), published in two volumes with no manuscripts extant, is also rather murky. Hṛṣikeśa Vedāntaśāstrī mentions in his introductory volume that he believed the SGK to have been about four hundred years old when he heard that a manuscript had surfaced c. 1910, though he was unable to examine that manuscript until about 1934. The colophon of that manuscript indicated that it had been copied from the original manuscript c. 1789. A few years later, the editor tells us, he saw another manuscript of the same text that had been copied c. 1810. Unfortunately, other literary scholars have not mentioned this text in their own studies, and of course there remain no extant manuscripts nor any mention of SGK exemplars in the standard manuscript catalogues.

Let us turn now from the question of provenance to that of authorship.

Authorship

The author of the AP claims to have been a domestic servant in Advaita Ācārya's household and describes events in that household with the perspective of such an insider as a kitchen servant: preparations for feeding guests, Sītā's recipes, her manner of cooking. While his accounts of these activities are quite convincing, it must be borne in mind that Advaita Ācārya was a proper traditional brahman householder, so his domestic life would be quite predictable, and anyone could have described his household, whether or not such a writer had actually witnessed the proceedings.

Majumdar disputes Īśāna's identity as a household servant, citing various "factual errors" in the text of the AP that he says would not have been made by someone as close to Advaita as this putative Īśāna Nāgara. However, since the "facts" of Advaita's life and activities can neither be confirmed nor denied, debate over the reliability of an author is not a productive endeavor. More useful would be an examination of the changing political circumstances of Advaita Ācārya's followers, which may have led them to write their biographies in the first place.

The lack of corroboration regarding the author's identity does not of itself disprove the existence of Īśāna Nāgara. One might speculate that Īśāna's name appears nowhere outside the Advaita corpus because he was a domestic servant who played no role in the life of Caitanya or other sectarian leaders. The authors of all three of the Advaita biographies were purportedly closely associated with Advaita Ācārya's family and thus had more personal connections with their subject (and, at the same time, less significant roles in sectarian politics) than did Caitanya's biographers: King Divyasiṁha, later known as Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa (author of the BLS), was Advaita Ācārya's father's employer, Īśāna Nāgara was a household servant, Haricaraṇa Dāsa (author of the AM) was a disciple of Advaita's son Acyuta. One must never forget that hagiography is produced for political and doctrinal purposes that are far more complicated than the simple telling of biography.

These authors played no role in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community, and any reference to any of them in the Caitanya hagiographies is so vague we cannot be certain if the two are referring to the same person. So these writers make no claim to political position within the community and speak only with the authority of their intimacy with their subject and, much more important, the authority conferred by their gurus' instructions to produce the hagiography. Thus their credibility rests not, like that of early Gauḍīya writers, on the demonstrated strength of their devotion but rather on the likelihood that their pres-

ence with Advaita and family lends them a new sort of historical credibility. This represents a shift in standards of authenticity and may in part fuel the sectarian ambiguity about what is, and what is not, "authentic."

And at the same time, these authors' positions vis-à-vis Advaita's family would naturally keep them largely out of public view, and so the lack of corroborative evidence of their existence, first, and their writing, second, is not surprising.

On the issue of authorship, as in the case of language, convincing evidence points both toward and away from our acceptance of Īśāna Nāgara and Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa as Advaita Ācārya's household servant and father's employer respectively.

Majumdar is more skeptical about the identity of the author of the AM than he is about the date of the text. He does not believe the author could have been the contemporary of Caitanya he claims to be, because his accounts of several events differ strikingly from those of the same events found in the CBh, the CC, and in Karṇapūra's text. He is, however, willing to believe that the text was composed in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, so that it was 200 to 250 years old in 1939.[14]

The author of the SGK claims to be one Viṣṇudāsa Ācārya, the son of Mādhavendra Purī, Advaita Ācārya's guru, who entrusted his son to Advaita's fosterage when he became a renunciate. Thus, like the other presumptive authors of the Advaita Ācārya corpus, Viṣṇudāsa Ācārya claims to have enjoyed an intimate relationship with Advaita Ācārya's family and, like Īśāna Nāgara, author of the AP, claims to have spent many years living in Advaita Ācārya's home. Viṣṇudāsa states that he wrote SGK at the request of Advaita's eldest son Acyuta, a request conveyed to the author in a dream c. 1521. However, that dream would have come twelve years before Caitanya's death and long before that of Advaita. Why would Acyuta have been thinking of a need to eulogize his mother, who would not yet have assumed the leadership role she would only take on after her husband's death? Two possibilities immediately come to mind: first, that Sītā may have played a more significant role in the early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community than we have been led to believe, and, second, that the text was actually written much later than purported and given this early genesis to bolster her status.

Hṛṣikeśa says that, while Acyuta requested both Īśāna Nāgara and Viṣṇudāsa to compose works about his parents, Viṣṇudāsa wrote his SGK long before Īśāna wrote the AP (purportedly c. 1568). The two mention each other in their respective compositions.

In the case of each work referenced herein, composition seems to have been motivated by an interest in asserting a smaller group's identity within the context of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as a whole, an interest that dovetails conveniently with a desire to ensure a proper place in sectarian history for important figures

whose memories seemed about to be consigned to oblivion. The Sītā Devī material, however, introduces a new dimension in its need to account for a strong leader who did not fit previously-established models of leadership and whose authority might therefore be questioned.

Every author has a particular agenda, resulting from his own biases, conscious or otherwise, which are in turn colored by his own specific social circumstances (male, brahman, South Asian, etc.). Equally problematic is determining what should be understood as hyperbole and how to interpret it. The dominant trait among the Advaita Ācārya works, however, is that every author is writing at his guru's behest (or at least claims to be doing so), and his composition reflects the views of that guru. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava biographies constitute one of the few examples in which one can actually know, to some degree, authorial intent, because merely by virtue of their survival the writings do actually reflect their author's (or that author's guru's) intent. Many of the authors indicate that they write at the behest of their guru, and so the narratives describe personal traits and experiences and events that a given school wants its followers, and perhaps a broader audience, to know about its founder. Those texts that survive do so because they were given wide circulation, passed from devotee to devotee, from temple to temple, with multiple copies made to ensure broad dissemination. Those that do not survive, or survive in very few copies, never received the same degree of acceptance.

Another objection Majumdar raises is the profusion of dates in the AP. Majumdar believes this concern with dating is a very modern feature that is not likely to have occurred to a sixteenth century Bengali writer because South Asian culture traditionally has not been particularly interested in linear conceptions of history or in historical dates. However, the culture displays an intense interest in dates for ritual and astrological purposes, so, while an abundance of dates in an Indian text may be unusual, it is not entirely surprising that an influential family would keep track of the dates of birth of its sons. The AP purports to have been written at the request of Sītā Devī some thirty years after Caitanya's death, that is, five years after Advaita's death, by which time concerns of succession and legitimacy were beginning to arise within the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community. The dates, especially of the births of Advaita Ācārya's sons, would have helped to establish rights of sectarian succession. Other texts in the Advaita corpus also mention dates. In addition to the BLS, the AM also gives a date of composition, and while Haricaraṇa Dāsa gives no other dates in his text, he tells us when events occurred in relation to each other. Although, as Majumdar points out, this interest in historical precision is unusual in South Asia, it seems to have been important to members of Advaita's branch of the community.

Possibly anticipating skepticism, Acyutacaraṇa has explained why the BLS remained so long hidden from the greater Vaiṣṇava community by telling us

that after Advaita's death his now-elderly former household servant Īśāna Dāsa went to Lāuḍa to propound Vaiṣṇavism and write a book describing Advaita's life (the *Advaita Prakāśa*) at the request of Advaita's widow Sītā Devī. He took the BLS with him to Lāuḍa to use as a reference for details of Advaita's early life. Acyutacaraṇa suggests that the sole original exemplar was thus removed to Lāuḍa, where it remained hidden until recently. Perhaps then all three of these intriguing texts were produced in the Sylhet area, far removed from the centers of Vaiṣṇava scholarship in Vṛndāvana and Navadvīpa, and remained there until Acyutacaraṇa brought them to public attention.

Texts that do not circulate cannot become well known and so can have no impact on the larger community. They can play no role in the community's self-definition or formation. Thus we must conclude that even if we take the information concerning the authors of the texts in question, and their dates of composition, at face value, the greater Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community—or even Advaita's branch thereof—did not regard them as important materials. But how could the tradition ignore hagiographies created by people so familiar with Advaita and his family?

We learn from Subir Kar that Acyutacaraṇa was not only a great scholar but was also a Vaiṣṇava whose great devotion to his guru, Rādhikānātha Gosvāmī, was well known. Thus in this man we find the confluence of Bengali literary scholarship, deep regional pride, heartfelt devotion to the guru and his lineage, and perhaps the same sense of outrage voiced by many East Bengalis who feel their cousins to the west ignore them and their history. Acyutacaraṇa received his title of *Tattvanidhi* for his lifelong commitment to Vaiṣṇavism and Vaiṣṇava literature and was a descendant of Advaita Ācārya and disciple of Rādhikānātha Gosvāmī of Advaita Ācārya's lineage. It is not inconceivable that a devotee would produce a work about his noted ancestor as an act of homage or as a gift to his guru. And these are some of the same reasons that motivate any hagiographer.[15]

While Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī is very well respected in the northeast of India and in Bangladesh for his exhaustive work on the history of Sylhet and for his efforts to preserve early Vaiṣṇava literature, even his recent biographer, Dr. Subir Kar, has mentioned that he found the coincidence somewhat suspicious, but "today it is almost an impossible task to verify the facts."[16]

These three texts that Acyutacaraṇa discovered form part of a changing tradition that saw in the medium of a western style historical scholarship—and the accompanying technologies of print—an opportunity to transform and bolster a flagging community. In that act, these texts appeal to the pride of geographically specific audiences who are displaying an incipient regionalism or nationalism; and the likewise appeal to the larger community of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas by augmenting an already rich tradition.[17]

Majumdar was right, but for the wrong reasons. His conclusion that the BLS, the AP, and the SC are not the early compositions they purport to be is correct. However, he was not correct on the basis of the information the texts contain. If we take "of dubious date of composition" to be the definition for the widely used term *inauthentic*, then these three texts are indeed inauthentic. Yet they do exist, and have been taken seriously by some members of the Vaiṣṇava community, particularly those belonging to Advaita's school, and so, in that sense, they are indeed authentic. Why? What need do they meet, and what allows believers to override their skepticism and accept these materials? And when were they produced, really?

The most crucial question to arise from this material is simply, "Why was it produced?" This type of biographical material is religious, commissioned and/or composed by believers holding particular agenda. Though Advaita's followers were, and continue to be, far less numerous than the followers of Nityānanda, from the very beginning the greater Gauḍīya tradition acknowledged Advaita's importance, and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja devotes an entire chapter to him in the CC (1.12), never hesitating to mention his presence and role in the early years of Caitanya's community. His status was not likely to fade (though the number of his followers certainly was), and so they generated these several texts in glorification of their beloved leader, to exalt him in the eyes of those remaining, and to highlight his brahmanical purity and his followers' continuing adherence to those age-old standards.

Further, as the fame and reputation of the texts produced by the *gosvāmīs* for the larger Gauḍīya community increased over time, the sect had less need for the type of legitimacy provided by the physical presence in their midst of the elderly scholar. Authority was now vested in the theological treatises. The writings of the *gosvāmīs* emphasize devotion to Kṛṣṇa himself rather than to Caitanya or any of the other leaders. The word, treasured as it continues to be in South Asia, supplanted the need for a mortal legitimator. Yet the Navadvīpa-Shantipur branch of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism emphasized the manifestation of the Vraja *līlā* in Bengal far more than it revered any text. The personal interactions among the devotees, each of whom was considered to be a member of that Vraja *līlā* reborn, were seen as parallel to the interactions among the residents of Vraja. One could speculate that, once the specific correspondences were proclaimed (in GGD), members of the community actively cultivated the type of relationship with Kṛṣṇa enjoyed by their Vraja counterparts. The unapproachable *aiśvarya* aspect of divinity represented by Advaita Ācārya receded further and further into doctrinal background in favor of the *mādhurya* aspect.

Advaita Ācārya's history after his death has become at least as significant as his contributions during his lifetime to his religious group. Although member-

ship in his school dwindled, those remaining followers were ardent devotees of their illustrious ancestor. Some of them had already tried, prior to the appearance of the texts Acyutacaraṇa discovered, to put forth materials about the early years of the Vaiṣṇava movement. Some of these efforts, most noteworthy of which was the scandal that attended *Govindadāsera Kaḍacā*, failed miserably; others enjoyed more success but were still not widely accepted outside of Advaita's own school. Several of these efforts coincided with Acyutacaraṇa's mission, assigned by his guru, to glorify his native region of Sylhet.

This same author who wrote the AP also expanded the *Sītā Caritra*, working from extant manuscripts but adding new material about Īśāna, putative author of the *Advaita Prakāśa*, to provide corroboration for his position with the family. In this way he made Īśāna, who wrote quite a bit more about himself in the AP than do most hagiographers, all the more real to the readers.

Perhaps we need to move our focus from the subject of these texts to their author. As Patricia Cox has pointed out, an author's own circumstances are often more reflected in the composition of religious biography than are those of the subject.[1] Thomas Head, writing on Christian hagiography, embellishes Cox's assertion by adding that hagiography also reveals a great deal about its intended audience, and that it "provides some of the most valuable records for the reconstruction and study of the practice of premodern Christianity"[2] as well as for any other group. Moving to South Asia, with the biographies of Swami Rama Tirtha, Robin Rinehart notes that especially recent biographies reflect "specific historical concerns, and also the changing nature of followers' experiences of Swami Rama Tirtha eighty years after his death."[3] David Lorenzen found a similar situation with the hagiographic material on Kabir: stories convey particular messages "that have their own historical importance, independent of whether or not the stories tell us what actually happened."[4] That is, the very existence of these stories is significant, aside from their content. Granoff and Shinohara add that hagiography created about founders of religious groups served to help "define and solidify distinctive religious communities."[5] Despite the relatively late start, scholars working with South Asian hagiographical materials have already added substantially to our knowledge of the genre. We now can look at circumstances external to the religious issues, for example, to help us determine why these pieces were produced.

The one major hagiography with which Acyutacaraṇa had nothing to do is the *Advaita Maṅgala*. The mission of the AM is slightly different from those of the other texts in the corpus. The AM credits Advaita Ācārya with, for example, the introduction (through Mādhavendra Purī) of *yugala sevā* (worship of the divine couple) and the notion of *parakiyā prema*. The AM, while not likely written by a contemporary of Caitanya's, was, most likely, produced within a century

of his death. By then Advaita had already fulfilled his early role of making the new religious community respectable in the eyes of their neighbors and may well have begun to recede into the background of sectarian awareness. Haricaraṇa Dāsa writes to remind us of who Advaita was and makes his stand about his subject's degree of divinity to drive his point home.

Clearly, hagiography is a process rather than a static literary form. Its motivations, production, and applications vary with changes in the sociology and politics of the group in question. The Advaita Ācārya hagiographies build on the tradition begun by the Caitanya hagiographers, and the Sītā Devī material builds on the Advaita material. Lokanātha Dāsa, in writing his original SC, could then use Sītā's image to posit an origin for the *sakhī bhāvaka* sect apparently aimed at bringing that marginalized group into the fold of sanctioned Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Acyutacaraṇa, building on Lokanātha Dāsa's work, added another dimension to the hagiographies.

It is not even entirely clear that there was a discrete school of Advaita Ācārya's followers, outside his direct descendants in the late nineteenth century. Quite possibly one of those descendants, Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi's guru, wanted to demonstrate that their lineage was not only hereditary but constituted a distinct group that differed from the other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava schools by its consistent adherence to Advaita's original teachings and mission. By producing texts in the Advaita Ācārya corpus the authors generated a school, a tradition, for texts confer legitimacy. These authors, most notably Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi, constructed a tradition for this revered ancestor through their words while Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī was doing the same through his devotional behavior. One important difference is that Vijaya Kṛṣṇa Gosvāmī was caste blind while Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi strove to uphold caste values. And at the same time Acyutacaraṇa managed to glorify the Sylhet region of their mutual birth and contribute to the movement to construct a Bengali literary history.

The materials they created have not been added to the larger canon of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas and never will, because of its privileging not of the movement's putative founder, Caitanya, but of Advaita Ācārya, for many of Advaita's followers claim that he is the agent responsible for the entire Gauḍīya movement. These works have found places in the hearts and minds of Advaita's descendants, particularly in the town of Shantipur, and did garner some scholarly attention in the years immediately prior to Indian independence. The Advaita Ācārya corpus plays a part in the devotional life of the Shantipur Gosvāmīs and so exemplifies a little-examined aspect of hagiographical process: its use to define and create religious community out of regional religious history.



NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Footnote on p. 254 of Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi's article in the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* article, 1896, pp. 3.4.
2. Advaita Ācārya is a title meaning "Master of Nondualism," and Advaita was awarded that title upon demonstrating his remarkable mastery of Sanskrit and Vedic scriptures. The title is somewhat problematic for his eventual religious associates, whose views are decidedly dualistic. I give the unlikely but widely accepted dates for Advaita's birth and death.
3. See map.
4. Puri, on the coast of Orissa, was and remains a major Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage site and home of the immense Jagannātha temple complex. Caitanya moved to Puri, rather than Vṛndāvana, at his mother's request, so that she would easily be able to receive news of him. Many members of the Gauḍīya community spent the rainy seasons there with him every year.
5. Kṛṣṇa Caitanya is a monastic name that would have been conferred when the young man became a *sannyāsī*, a renunciate, and moved to Puri. The title *Caitanya* is conferred on novices in some of the South Indian *dasanāmī* orders, including the Bhārati order to which his Caitanya's first guru, Keśava Bhārati, belonged.
6. See Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, for more on this settlement.
7. Lahiri, *Chaitanya Movement in Eastern India*, pp. 252–254; Sarma, "Śaṅkaradeva and Assam Vaiṣṇavism," pp. 241–270.
8. Advaita's widow and second son, both sectarian leaders after Advaita's death.
9. The standard Vaiṣṇava euphemism for the death of any person they consider divine.
10. In keeping with the pastoral imagery of Kṛṣṇa's childhood, the six theologians Caitanya entrusted with the task of codifying his philosophy were given the title of *gosvāmin*, or "lord of cattle." Nityānanda later used the same title for his own deputies, and eventually the families of both Nityānanda and Advaita would take Gosvāmī as their surnames.

11. These include Lord Raglan, Otto Rank, Donald Redford, Alwyn Rees, Joseph Campbell, and Alan Dundes, among others. More recent scholars to examine these tropes as they apply to South Asian hagiography include Rupert Snell, David Lorenzen, and William Jackson.
12. Lorenzen, *Bhakti Religion*, pp. 187–188.
13. Jackson, *Tyāgarāja: Life and Lyrics*, pp. 12–19.
14. Hefferman, *Sacred Biography*, p. 138.
15. Literally, "vision" or "sight" of the divine, understood as an act of worship or reverence.
16. De, *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*, p. 245.
17. *Rādhā bhāva* (Rādhā's mood) refers to the state of intense longing for Kṛṣṇa that Rādhā experienced when separated from her divine lover.
18. Elkman, *Jīva Gosvāmin's Tattvasandarbha*, p. 26. For this reason Friedhelm Hardy considers Baladeva, rather than Caitanya, the founder of the Gauḍīya *saṃpradāya*.

1. THE BIRTH OF AN IMAGE

1. Walters, "Stūpa, Story, and Empire," in Schober, *Sacred Biography*, p. 160.
2. O'Flaherty, "Inside and Outside the Mouth of God," p. 113.
3. Burke, *History and Social Theory*, p. 101.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 101; Malinowsky, "The Role of Myth in Life."
5. Devy, "*Of Many Heroes*," p. 31.
6. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 192.
7. Cited in Robin Rinehart, *One Lifetime, Many Lives*, p. 8.
8. White, "Indian Developments: Sainthood in Hinduism," p. 98.
9. Ibid. *Saguṇa* ("with qualities") refers to those devotional schools that posit Ultimate Reality as possessing various qualities rendering Him/Her perceptible with human senses, and with whom devotees may have some sort of relationship.
10. White, "Indian Developments," p. 99.
11. Hawley, *Saints and Virtues*, p. xiv.
12. Ibid., p. xvi.
13. Widengren, *Prolegomena*, p. 12.
14. Smart, *Worldviews*, p. 14.
15. Gier, "The Savior Archetype," p. 267.
16. No one has ever disputed Advaita Ācārya's or Caitanya's historical existence.
17. Hefferman, *Sacred Biography*, p. 114.
18. Contemporary anthropologists frequently report difficulties in obtaining individual life stories from their informants, because the informants routinely report their history as a litany of cultural expectations for their social position.
19. Cited in O'Flaherty, *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, p. 276.
20. Cited in Williams, *Charisma and Sacred Biography*, p. 15.

21. Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, p. 157.
22. Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint*, p. 9.
23. Jackson, *Tyāgarāja*, p. 10.
24. Williams, *Charisma*, p. 16.
25. Ibid., p. 17.
26. Murrin, *Veil of Allegory*, p. 10.
27. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, p. 24.
28. Ibid., p. 23.
29. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, p. x.
30. Ibid., p. 3.
31. Quinn, "The Cultural Basis of Metaphor," in Fernandez, *Beyond Metaphor*, p. 65.
32. Schober, *Sacred Biography*, p. 3.
33. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, p. 46.
34. Ibid., p. 47.
35. Migot, "Un Grand Disciple du Buddha," p. 409.
36. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, p. 5. The five types Ray describes are 1. the buddha ("enlightened one"), initiator of Buddhist tradition in any era; 2. the pratyeka-buddha ("enlightened by oneself"), a solitary saint who lives in remote regions and meditates; 3. the arhant ("worthy [of offerings]"), enlightened disciple of a buddha or later saint within Nikāya Buddhism; 4. the bodhisattva ("enlightenment-being"), who aspires to the realization of a buddha and whose special charisma derives from his aspiration to this supreme enlightenment; and 5. the siddha ("perfected one").
37. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, p. 5.
38. Schober, *Sacred Biography*, p. 2.
39. Literally, "stream-forders," those early Jainas who set the pattern of conduct.
40. Granoff and Shinohara, *Speaking of Monks*, p. 1.
41. Peterson, *Poems to Śiva*, p. 19; Monius, "Śiva as Heroic Father."
42. Lorenzen, *Bhakti Religion*, pp. 181–182.
43. Ernst, "Lives of Sufi Saints," in Lopez, *Religions of India in Practice*, p. 494.
44. Shakeb, "The Role of Sufis in the Changing Society of the Deccan, 1500–1750." In Lewisohn and Morgan, *The Heritage of Sufism*, pp. 361–375.
45. Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, p. 48.
46. Ibid., p. 50.
47. Bengali religious leaders have nearly all been male. For discussion on an early exception to this fact, see Manring, "At Home in the World: the Lives of Sītādevī," and chapter 7, this volume.
48. Following the example of such cities as Chennai (Madras) and Mumbai (Bombay), residents of Kolkata chose in mid-1999 to return to using the precolonial name of their city (Calcutta).
49. Sinha, "The Nadia School of Sanskrit Learning," pp. 89–102.
50. Some believe Kṛṣṇa Caitanya suffered from epilepsy, because of the reported frequency of these trances, in which he usually lost consciousness.

51. Though born a prince, Kṛṣṇa was raised by foster parents in the cowherding community of Vraja, in present-day Uttar Pradesh. That Vraja is said to exist eternally and timelessly on a heavenly plane, which came to earth in Nadīyā at the time of Caitanya.
52. Usually by Kavi Karṇapūra, though no document authored by Svarūpa in which this doctrine is expounded, remains extant.
53. Sadāśiva is that aspect of Śiva worshipped by the Sena dynasty, a point to which I will return in chapters 4 and 5.
54. Śakti, literally "power," is the feminine force that enervates a male god.
55. *...bhaktarūpo gauracandro yato'sau nandanandanaḥ*
bhaktasvarūpo nityānando vraje yaḥ śrīhalāyudhaḥ
bhaktāvatāra ācāryo'dvaito yaḥ śrīsadāśivaḥ
bhaktākhyāḥ śrīnivāsādyā yatas te bhaktarūpiṇaḥ
bhaktaśaktirdvijāgraṇyaḥ śrīgadādharapaṇḍitaḥ
56. Some lists also include the Buddha, and some even include Jesus.
57. And the MBh in which the *Gītā* is found. The epic as a whole is less devotional, and so here I refer only to the *Gītā*, probably a later interpolation into the epic.
58. See discussion of the devotional continuum in the introduction.
59. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a relatively late composition, probably dating from the ninth century C.E., although Dennis Hudson in his compelling research suggests a much earlier date.
60. Ibid.
61. For a very thorough treatment of the Caitanya corpus and the early history of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement, see Stewart's "*The Final Word*."
62. Stewart, "*The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya*," p. 72.
63. Ibid., p. 77; cf. KCC 1.4.4, cited above.
64. This is the term often used for a divine incarnation, viewed theologically as a part of the god (usually Viṣṇu) appearing on earth, while the full god remains in his heavenly abode.
65. KCC, 1.4.4–5. Tony Stewart's translation, cited in his "*The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya*," pp. 70–71.
66. Bijit Kumar De, a staunch advocate of Sylheti regional pride, differs with this view, claiming that Mādhavendra was born in Lāuḍa, near Sylhet in the village of Pāṇipāṭha.
67. Hardy, "Mādhavendra Purī: A Link ," p. 26.
68. Credited with the major reorganization of the monastic orders into ten groups now known as the *dasanāmī svāmins*. Each group confers a particular title on its initiates, such as Purī, Bhārati, Tīrtha, etc.
69. Kavi Karṇapūra, in his GGD, formally associates each of Caitanya's relatives and associates with a member of the eternal Vraja circle of Kṛṣṇa and his family and companions. Most likely Karṇapūra's text in large part crystallized an already widely accepted schema. In this plan the sage Nārada is the elder Śrīnivāsa.
70. Stewart, "*The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya*," p. 83; translation Stewart's.
71. *advaita-ācāryya bali kathā kaha yāra* /

sei nāḍha lāgi mora ei avatāra // 2.5.48
mohare anilā nāḍha vaikuṇṭha thākiyā / // 2.5.49

72. CBh 1.2.87, 91; 1.2.118; 1.7.188–193; 2.2.262–263; 2.5.45–47; 2.6.38; 2.6.92–93; 2.10.122; 2.19.140; 3.9.45–50; 3.10.290–292. I am indebted to Tony Stewart for pointing out these citations to me.
73. CBh 2.6.112–29.
74. CBh 2.6.147–50; 2.19.241.
75. CBh 2.19.255.
76. CBh 2.6.151.
77. CBh 2.19.219:
nityānanda-advaita ye gālāgāli vāje /
sei se paramānanda—yadi jane vujhe //
78. CBh 2.16.62–65, 72–75.
79. CBh 3.4.466–68.
80. KCCM 7.26–27.
81. KCCM 7.53–54.
82. Sarvabhauma was the court *paṇḍita* to King Prataparudra, whose palace was in Puri.
83. KCCM 14.45.
84. CM 2.1.17; these names for Advaita's parents appear nowhere else, and the other authors call them Kubera and Lābhā.
85. CCN 1.10–11, *Ślokas* 6–7.
86. CCN 1.31, *Śloka* 23.
87. Stewart, "*The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya,*" p. 460.
88. Stewart, "One Text from Many," p. 248.
89. CC 1.6.1–34.
90. CC 1.6.30, 72, 90–91.
91. CC 1.12.1–74.
92. *Ācāryya gosāñi prabhura bhakta avatāra* /
kṛṣṇa-avatāra hetu yāhāra huṅkāra // 1.3.72; translation Dimock's.
93. Translation Dimock's.
advaita-ācāryya īśvarera aṁśāvaryya /
tāra tattva nāma guṇa—sakala aścaryya // *1.6.29*
yāhāra tulasī jale yāhāra huṅkāre /
svagaṇa sahite caitanyera avatāre // *1.6.30*
Yāra dvārā kaila prabhu kīrttana pracāra /
yāra dvārā kaila prabhu jagata-nistāra // *1.6.31*
. . . ācāryya gosāñi—caitanyera mukhya aṅga / *1.6.33a,b*
advaita-ācāryya gosāñira mahimā apāra /
yāhāra huṅkāre kaila caitanyāvatāra // *1.6.99*
94. There are at least three extant biographies of Nityānanda. The first of these is entirely excerpted from the *Caitanya Bhāgavata,* but the other two are probably relatively recent compositions. These are:
Nityānanda Caritāmṛta ("Nectar of the Life of Nityānanda"), ascribed to Vṛndāvana Dāsa (Calcutta: Bhujangabhusan Ray, 1914).

Nityānanda Vaṁśavallī o Sādhana ("Nityānanda's Genealogy and Practices"), Kṣirodbihar Gosvāmī (Calcutta: Kohinur, 1930).

Nityānanda Prabhura Vaṁśavistāra ("Lord Nityānanda's Full Genealogy"), attributed to Vṛndāvana Dāsa; ed. Nabincandra Addhya (Calcutta: n.p., 1874).

95. Stewart, "*The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya,*" p. 442.

2. ADVAITA ĀCĀRYA: A NEW IMMINENCE

1. For example, Haricaraṇa Dāsa will tell us, Advaita's servant Kṛṣṇadāsa was nearby taking careful notes of the entire conversation between Advaita Ācārya and Mādhavendra Purī and later passed his notes on to Śrīnātha Ācārya, who allowed Haricaraṇa Dāsa to use them in composing AM.
2. Rasikacandra Basu, "*Advaita Maṅgala.*"
3. See explanation and diagram in the introduction.
4. *Līlā,* "play," refers in this context to Kṛṣṇa's childhood and adolescent activities in Vraja.
5. The word *svarūpa* has a precise philosophical meaning in the theological treatises, but here and in much of the hagiographical corpus the word has a general and less technical sense of "true nature"; that is to say, the nature/form we do not usually see. Just as ordinary mortals could not function if they could see the true nature of the phenomenal world, so we could not operate if we saw the divinity all around us, routinely. Thus Kṛṣṇa's *svarūpa* is rarely visible. Further, the use of terms like *avatāra* and *svarūpa* is often, as one of Advaita Ācārya's descendants in Shantipur told me in 1993, "just the way we talk about great men."
6. Since in no edition of the text are the verses numbered, specific quotations can only be cited by chapter and book or by page number in the Maiti edition.
7. *Sarveṣām avatārānāṁ prakāśāni bahuni ca*
   vrajalīlābhāvaniyā tasmāt paratāro nahi
8. Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Manuscript No. 2639.
9. Manuscripts not only lack punctuation but there are rarely clear breaks between verses or even between words.
10. The heavenly locus of Kṛṣṇa's eternal Vṛndāvana *līlā.*
11. Vṛndāvana, literally, "Vṛndā's Forest," is one specific area of Vraja, where Kṛṣṇa spent most of his adolescence. "Vraja" and " Vṛndāvana" are often used interchangeably in the texts.
12. Madana Gopāla is the image of Kṛṣṇa that Advaita eventually installs in his own temple in Shantipur and still worshipped there today.
13. See note 2 regarding *svarūpa.* While *aṁśa* means "part" and does have a technical meaning in the Gauḍīya theological literature, Haricaraṇa's use of the expression "part of the Lord" simply signifies greatness.
14. Maiti edition, p. 16. Haricaraṇa opens each chapter with several verses of praise concerning that chapter's topic. These verses often provide succinct clues to the author's intention. *Mahāprabhu* ("Great Lord") refers to Caitanya. Nityānanda and Advaita are often referred to as *Prabhu,* "Lord."

15. The great circle dance that Kṛṣṇa performed with 160,000 young women on the night of the autumnal full moon, on which occasion he produced multiple projections of himself so that each cowherd woman believed she was alone dancing with Kṛṣṇa. This event serves as a standard model of the devotion to be cultivated, for each woman was so completely engrossed in her longing for Kṛṣṇa that she threw all propriety aside, leaving her husband's bed in the middle of the night for the fleeting pleasure of the company of her divine beloved.
16. Rādhā is actually not named in the BhP, and most scholars believe her not to have been yet created at the time of its composition.
17. The *sakhīs*, who sometimes participate in the loveplay with Kṛṣṇa, and the younger *mañjarīs*, who wait on Kṛṣṇa and his lover during their trysts.
18. Maiti edition, p. 31. The literal meaning of *Goloka* ("World of Cows") reinforces the pastoral motif of Kṛṣṇa's childhood.
19. Maiti edition, p. 32. Lakṣmīkānta, Śrīkānta, Hariharānanda, Sadāśiva, Kusala, and Kirticandra. The daughter is not named.
20. The month of Mākara corresponds to the astrological sign of Capricorn. Today Advaita Ācārya's birthday is observed in Shantipur in January; in 2001, when I last observed it, the festival fell on January 31.
21. The impersonal god. This name is rarely applied to the god of the Vaiṣṇava schools, but is often used for Śiva.
22. Chatterjee, *Religion in Bengal During the Pala and the Sena Times*, p. 178.
23. Beginning on p. 42, Maiti edition.
24. Maiti edition, p. 47.
25. Ibid., p. 51.
26. While all the leaders of the Vaiṣṇava community were indeed members of the brahman caste, at least theoretically Vaiṣṇavism was open to all. Vaiṣṇavas honored the orthodox scriptural injunctions regarding the giving of food, clothing, and other gifts to brahmans whenever one has received any sort of blessing. At the same time, they naturally believed their own group had discovered the highest of truths, and so the benefits that always fell to brahmans now fell to the entire Vaiṣṇava community as well.
27. Maiti edition, p. 59. Mādhavendra mentions Caitanya's name some forty years before his birth!
28. *Advaita kṛpā vine caitanya nā pāī*
Bhajare bhajare bhāī advaita gosāñī
29. Kāśī is, of course, east of Gayā. See map on page 163 for the geographically challenging route Haricaraṇa describes.
30. This is the proper name of an image of Kṛṣṇa. Temple images bear individual names, and each, once properly installed for worship, is believed to be Kṛṣṇa in a very real sense, and is treated accordingly.
31. Whose birth was yet some years in the future; Advaita had not yet married at this time. The significance of this cry will become apparent in the final section of this chapter.

32. According to the term *parakīya* (literally, "belonging to another") love, the *gopīs'* love for Kṛṣṇa is the highest model for the love of the devotee for God. The *gopīs* were married to other men, and yet were willing to risk everything to meet secretly with Kṛṣṇa. This notion is contrasted in Vaiṣṇava literature with love for one's own partner, *svakīya* ("[with] one's own").
33. Those gatherings must have taken place in the area now known as Bāblā, five miles from Shantipur, which Advaita described as very much like Mathurā, with the river flowing on all three sides. The river has since shifted its course, as often happens in monsoon regions, but Bāblā remains a beautiful and serene location. A temple to Advaita now stands there, and families enjoy winter picnics on the grounds.
34. Maiti edition, p. 93.
    sehi kṛṣṇa hao tumi sehi rādhā sakhī
    eve avatāra tumi bhakta-bhāva lakhi
35. Though Divyasiṁha had hinted at this, much earlier.
36. *Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare*
    Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare
37. Conqueror of the (four) directions.
38. Maiti edition, pp. 106–107.
39. Most likely Śrīnātha Cakravarttī, one of Advaita's close disciples, and himself the guru of Kavi Karṇapūra and author of the *Caitanya-Matamañjūṣa*, a commentary on the BhP.
40. Maiti edition, p. 113.
41. Translation, Dimock.
42. Manring, *Kavikarṇapūra's Gauragaṇoddeśadīpikā*, p. 37 ff. The *vyūha* doctrine arises out of the Pañcarātra system, an earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism described in the three *Pañcarātra Saṁhitās* (*Īśvara Saṁhitā*, *Śrī Praśna Saṁhitā*, and the *Nārada Pañcarātra*), which posited a fourfold divinity. At its apex is Vāsudeva, the all-powerful Supreme, who emanates from himself first Saṅkarṣaṇa, then Pradyumna, and finally Aniruddha, each of which is associated with a specific aspect of existence such as consciousness or mind. Different philosophers express these formulations slightly differently. Among the scholars who have discussed *vyūha* theory are J. Estlin Carpenter, Chinmayi Chatterjee, Sushil Kujar De, Jan Gonda, Friedhelm Hardy, John C. Plott, Daniel P. Sheridan, and R. N. Vyas.
43. Srinivasan, "From Transcendency to Materiality," p. 109.
44. The *āgamas* were produced some centuries prior to the onset of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and considerably further west. The Śaiva Siddhāntas, who generated them, are a dualistic Śaiva group and perhaps the most acceptable to the general public in their practices. Śaivism was widespread in Bengal at the time in question, and so we cannot rule out the possibility that educated Vaiṣṇavas would be familiar with their texts.
45. According to David Haberman, *mañjarī sādhanā* was first suggested in Kavi Karṇapūra's *Gauragaṇoddeśa Dīpikā* (verses 185 to 192) but was not fully developed as a practice until the mid seventeenth century. In fact neither Rūpa nor

any of the other *gosvāmīs* write of this practice. Narottama Dāsa (early to mid seventeenth century C.E.) had quite a bit to say about it, and by the time of his death it had become widely accepted. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, pp. 109–110. Tony K. Stewart offers a different view, that the practice was already well-developed somewhat earlier, when Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja was writing his CC (completed probably no later than 1615). "The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya," p. 356.

46. Or perhaps the more casually affectionate "Sparky."
47. This desire to taste the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is significantly one of the three promises that impelled Caitanya to incarnate. CC 1.4.89–178. Kṛṣṇa has also vowed to know his own wonderful sweetness and to know Rādhā's delight in him.
48. Vijaya Purī has already asserted that Advaita's own parents were Kṛṣṇa's biological parents King Vasudeva and Queen Devakī. Caitanya's parents then will be Kṛṣṇa's foster parents.
49. Humans who perform austerities for extended periods become sufficiently powerful to rule the gods.
50. Maiti edition, pp. 122–123.
51. Ibid., pp. 124–125.
52. As edited by Rādhikānātha Gosvāmī; in the other editions (Sukumar Sen; Venīmādhava Śila; Viṣṇupada Pāṇḍā) available to me this portion falls in 1.14.
53. Possibly Mukunda Ṭhākura. The *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna* mentions several by the name of Mukunda, but none of the others fit the description above.
54. This statement will become important after Advaita's marriage, when Sītā is associated with Yogamāyā.
55. The month of Bhādra runs from mid August to mid September, and corresponds to the astrological sign of Virgo.
56. Clearly a reference to Sītā's *mañjarī sādhanā* identity, and this would be somewhat unusual, because Sītā as a real woman would not seem to need to use this practice.
57. Apparently Nṛsiṁha always intended his daughters to marry the same man, though Haricaraṇa does not specifically say so.
58. A black stone containing a fossil ammonite, sacred to Vaiṣṇavas, who believe it pervaded by Viṣṇu. Most *śālagrāmas* originate in or near the village of Śālagrāma on the Gaṇḍakī River.
59. Jan Brzezinski, "Women Saints," cites a similar anecdote from *Nityānanda Vaṁśavistāra* in which Nityānanda's wife Jāhnavā sprouts extra arms to save her dignity when her *sārī* slips.
60. The genders of these two are not clear anywhere in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature and were clearly matters of interest and speculation.
61. The second evolute in the *catur vyūha* schema.
62. See *Vāmana Purāṇa*, chapter 13.
63. Dimock and Stewart, *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, introduction, p. 87.

64. In the northeastern part of what is now Bangladesh.
65. The month of Phālgun runs from mid February to mid March and corresponds to the astrological sign of Pisces.
66. Maiti edition, p. 206.
67. Maiti edition, p. 215.
68. This relationship is a bit of a twist on the third stage of devotion, *vatsalya,* in which one imagines oneself the parent of God. Here the roles are reversed as Caitanya is treating Advaita as the parent.
69. Maiti edition, p. 215.
70. "Without qualities," the monistic view of the divine as beyond human traits.
71. This Śaṅkara is often confused with the Śaṅkaradeva who became a Vaiṣṇava leader in Assam.
72. Maiti edition, p. 224.
73. Maiti edition, p. 227. Most of the material Haricaraṇa provides regarding Sītā Devī centers on her culinary skills. Whatever she may represent in theological terms, she is very much a proper brahman wife.
74. *Prasāda* usually refers to food that has been offered to the deity; what the deity does not consume is then offered to the devotees, and is understood to contain the special blessing of contact with the deity.
75. Though it should be pointed out that while Kṛṣṇa made every *gopī* think she was the sole recipient of his amorous attentions, Sītā makes every guest feel he is the sole beneficiary of her culinary skills. So while both figures have been reproduced in the same manner, their respective functions are quite different. Maiti edition, p. 231.
76. Haricaraṇa uses the word *aiśvarya* here, but in this context it connotes "divinity" rather than the polar opposite of *mādhurya.*

3. VARIANT MESSAGES: NONHAGIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS TREATING ADVAITA ĀCĀRYA

1. Minor in the sense of their obscurity as well as of their length.
2. This is admittedly argument from silence; however, the large number of this particular group of materials, compared to the relative dearth of manuscripts of the strictly hagiographical works, does suggest that *someone* was paying attention to them. And the absence of manuscripts outside West Bengal suggests, albeit inconclusively, that no one saw fit to take the works east.
3. At the time, about twenty-five American cents.
4. A number of Vaiṣṇava titles include the phrase *uddeśa-dīpikā* ("the light of instructions"). These best-known of these is Karṇapūra's *Gauragaṇoddeśa Dīpikā.*
5. Titles often are bestowed by scribes or collectors and not necessarily by the authors themselves, so finding different copies of the same text bearing different titles is not unusual.

6. Advaita's family uses this title as their surname, as does Nityānanda's, and because Bengali script does not distinguish case we cannot be certain that *gosvāmī* is not intended as a personal name here.
7. The statement that a composition was written "through the grace of" an individual often can be understood to mean "at the request of" that person.
8. The amorous exploits of Kṛṣṇa and their religious origins have been discussed by many scholars, and so I will not go into them here. Interested readers should consult the works of S. K. De, Edward C. Dimock Jr., David Haberman, John Stratton Hawley, Donna Wulff, and others.
9. The term *mañjarī sādhanā* is nonetheless used, because the method of meditation is the same. This choice of other, and especially of male, identities is unusual. For a detailed treatment of this practice, see David Haberman's *Acting as a Way of Salvation.*
10. Tony K. Stewart has told me in private conversations that he understands Sadāśiva as the form of Śiva that worships Viṣṇu. However, neither of us has been able to locate textual verification for this assertion.
11. Even today many Vṛndāvana residents insist that Kṛṣṇa is the only male in town, and all others are female in relation to him.
12. The word is the comparative form of *pūrṇa,* "full, complete."
13. Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes,* p. 120.
14. Srinivisan, "From Transcendancy," p. 109.
15. Sadāśiva appears frequently in Bengali sculpture from this period. See Srinivasan, "From Transcendency to Materiality," pp. 108–142.
16. Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Passing of Arthur," *Idylls of the King.* The image is popular in India as well: one sees a similar phenomenon in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Hindi film, as Amitabh Bacchan passes the hero's baton to Shah Rukh Khan in such movies as *Mohabattein* (2000) and *Khabi Khushi, Khabie Gham* (2001).
17. Nityānanda's wife Jāhnavā occupied a lesser but similar leadership role for her husband's followers after his death.
18. The name Vāsudeva is a patronymic, denoting the son of Vasudeva.
19. Polygamy was not unusual at this time, particularly among high caste brahmans.
20. Biman Bihari Majumdar in his *Śrīcaitanyera Caritera Upādāna* discusses this at length, pp. 445–450.
21. The Caitanya *paramavādins* vs. the Advaita *paramavādins.*
22. Maitra, *Śrīśrī Advaitācarya,* p. 43.
23. This notion of Kāmadeva as an Advaita *paramavādin* is a minority view. Other opinions hold that Kāmadeva was one of Advaita's original (i.e., before Caitanya's birth) students who found himself unable to renounce nondualistic philosophy for the dualistic devotion his guru was now advocating. Advaita renounced Kāmadeva and the other students who sided with him. The story of their leaving the area would then make sense, as the emotional climate in

Nadīyā would no longer support their views. We will return to this issue of philosophical defection in chapters 6 and 8.

24. *Parakīya prema* is considered the highest type of love because the woman will lose everything—husband, community status, etc.—if discovered. Theologians advocating this approach hold that the devotee should similarly be ready and willing to risk all for the sake of union with Kṛṣṇa.
25. This is not an unusual problem in South Asia. Usually Vaiṣṇava writers quoted real passages from other texts to support their arguments. Frequently, however, some have seemed to invent relevant passages that it seems to them must be in the work they cite—or at least, such a passage should be there! The issue is further confused by the fact that the Sanskrit *Padma Purāṇa* is a completely different text from the Bengali *Padma Purāṇa*. The Sanskrit text takes its name from the lotus (*padma*) at Viṣṇu's navel out of which Brahmā emanates to begin each cycle of creation. It is a Vaiṣṇava *purāṇa* of uncertain age. The Bengali text belongs to the *Manasā Maṅgala* corpus and celebrates the distinctly Bengali serpent goddess Manasā.
26. Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī edition, p. 38.
27. Ibid., p. 39.
28. Ibid., p. 41.
29. Ibid., p. 41.
30. Ibid., p. 43.
31. Rūpa Gosvāmin, in verses 121–122 of his *Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-Gaṇoddeśa Dīpikā*, explains that Anaṅgā Mañjarī is Rādhā's younger sister. Rāmacandra Gosvāmī, in verse 10 of his *Anaṅgā Mañjarī Samputikā*, expands on this by adding that Anaṅgā Mañjarī is Jāhnavā Devī, the wife of Nityānanda.
32. Two intriguing figures, originally male, whom Kānudeva reports "truly became women." They will appear again in the *Sītā Caritra*; see chapter 7.
33. Śaṅkara, described in the texts as a Vedānta student of Advaita's who refused to accept Caitanya's dualistic devotion, is sometimes confused with the Śaṅkaradeva of Assam. The name may also be understood as generic, indicating simply an *advaitin*.
34. Caitanya's left-hand man, to contrast with Advaita, Caitanya's right-hand man; Nityānanda was introduced earlier, in chapter 2.
35. Kavi Karṇapūra posits Gopāla Bhaṭṭa, one of the six *gosvāmīs*, as the Bengali manifestation of Anaṅgā Mañjarī in his *Gauragaṇoddeśa Dīpikā*, verse 184. And elsewhere, as mentioned previously, Nityānanda's wife Jāhnavā is given this *sādhanā* assignment.
36. Haridāsa Dāsa, in the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna*, vol. 3, lists this work, which he tells us has all but vanished, remaining only partially extant in one manuscript. Nevertheless, his description of the text fits the citations Kānudeva uses. One of the two remaining extant chapters is a conversation between the ubiquitous sage Nārada and Sadāśiva on the general state of degeneracy of the world in Kali Yuga, with some instructions for meditation practices to be conducted in the mood of the cowherd girls and the spirit of *parakīya prema*. In the other

extant chapter (chapter 55), Kṛṣṇa's eventual wife Rukmiṇī asks Kṛṣṇa to tell her about his life in Vṛndāvana.

37. Kṛṣṇa Miśra's speeches and those of Balarāma are in Sanskrit, but Kānudeva does not give the name of any text or texts from which these quotations are drawn. Perhaps we are to understand these passages as records of actual speech, for educated brahman men of their time would have been able to converse in Sanskrit.
38. It is not clear whether this Bengali part is a continuation of Kṛṣṇa Miśra's speech or Kānudeva's own words. It is definitely not a translation of the Sanskrit.
39. Kiśorī Dāsa Bābāj edition, p. 49:
    Rādhā Kṛṣṇa dui svarūpa gaurāṅga jāniyā
    Dohāra prakāśa sītā-advaita māniyā
40. KCC 1.4.
41. Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat MS No. 1463. The manuscript is undated but probably was copied some time in the nineteenth century. The paleography is modern. The introduction to this manuscript is identical with that of BSP MS No. 982 of the *Sītā Caritra*, which I will discuss in chapter 7.
42. Kṛṣṇadāsa may be a proper name or merely an epithet, "servant of Kṛṣṇa," which any male Vaiṣṇava could apply to himself.
43. As discussed above, the divine force can occupy any number of bodies simultaneously. Conversely a single body can be constituted by any number of deities. Some of the oldest sculpture in South Asia depicts Ardhanārīśvara, the god who is half man and half woman. Some writers have proclaimed Advaita Ācārya the joint incarnation of Mahāviṣṇu and Sadāśiva. Caitanya is the dual embodiment of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. And now we are told, in a reversal of the usual template, that Balarāma was both Nityānanda and Advaita.
44. *Sahajiyā* is usually translated as "easy" or "natural," and the term has become eponymous for a number of loosely related groups whose participants use their own bodies in their devotional practices. For more on *sahajiyā* praxis and theology, see articles by Glen Hayes, and Edward C. Dimock's *Place of the Hidden Moon.*
45. Asiatic Society MS No. G-5413; Kolkata University MS Nos. 3126, 4256, 3958 and 1199.
46. In many texts of the Advaita corpus, Advaita Ācārya is often addressed as Sadāśiva. We have already seen many cases in which Advaita Ācārya is equated with this form of Śiva. Many *sahajiyā* texts are written in the form of a dialogue between Śiva and his wife Pārvatī, who asks him questions about various practices.
47. Most likely *Om namo Nārāyaṇāya.*
48. *Klīṁ kāmadevāya vidmahe*
    Puṣpabāṇāya dhīmahi
    Tan no'naṅgaḥ pracodayāt
49. This is no longer always the case.
50. CC 2.8.137.
51. At this point the practitioner apparently resumes his normal male identity.

52. One must wonder how intercourse occurs, but this is indeed what the text says.
53. Calcutta University MS No. 3195.
54. Asiatic Society MS No. G-5404; Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat MS No. 1820.
55. For example, red flowers may represent menstruation, though each author may choose a different red flower to do so.
56. Sixteen in all, according to Jatindramohan Bhattacharjee. To my knowledge none has ever been published.
57. The name of the Sanskrit *Advaita Maṅgala* appears in none of the standard manuscript catalogues, nor is it mentioned in any of the standard secondary sources. Pramāṇika may have been referring to the *Bālya Līlā Sūtra,* which is in Sanskrit.
58. Vol. 1, p. 91.
59. Ray, *History of the Bengali People,* p. 338; *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* 2.8.3–10.
60. Mani, *Contentious Traditions,* p. 1.
61. Mani's 1998 treatment of the subject of *sati* focuses on both colonial records and indigenous comments surrounding the *sati* question, as well as on the issue of the human suffering it engendered.
62. MS Nos. 2886 and 265.
63. "Golden-Bodied One," an epithet of Caitanya, who would not be born for more than fifty years after this event. Many of his followers believed Caitanya to be the dual embodiment of Kṛṣṇa. and Rādhā, with Rādhā's golden complexion visible to all.
64. See chapters 5 and 6.
65. See chapter 6 for full discussion of this text.
66. "Series of verses."
67. Bh.R., *Taraṅga* 12, NAPM poem No. 10. In this and the following translations I seek only to capture the semantic meaning of the poems and make no effort to re-create their original meters.
68. No. 18 in the booklet, *Pada-kalpa-taru* 3.17.2.
69. Balarāma is the name of the poet; most of this sort of lyric poetry includes the writer's signature line at or near the end.

4. REVIVAL AND RETURN

1. *Journal of the Bengali Literary Society.* I will return to this organization shortly.
2. See especially Brian Hatcher's books, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse,* and *Idioms of Improvement.*
3. David Kopf, "The Universal Man," p. 43.
4. Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature,* p. 70. His more significant history of Bengali literature is his five-volume study in the Bengali language.
5. Ratte, *The Uncolonized Heart,* p. 132.
6. Ibid., p. 132.
7. Ibid., p. 132.
8. Ibid., p. 133.

9. Ibid., p. 133.
10. Ibid., p. 156.
11. Ibid., p. 157.
12. *Bangadarshan* Nov.-Dec. 1880, *Bamkim Rachanabali,* vol. 2; Ratte, *Uncolonized Heart,* p. 157.
13. Ratte, *Uncolonized Heart,* p. 157.
14. Ibid., p. 169.
15. Ibid., p. 169.
16. Ibid., p. 206.
17. Ibid., p. 207.
18. Bireshwar Pare, *"Ādhunika Baṅga sāhitya,"* pp. 51–74; Ratte, *Uncolonized Heart,* p. 208.
19. Ratte, *Uncolonized Heart,* p. 213.
20. Ibid., p. 249.
21. Tapankumar Raychaudhuri, *Bengal Under Akbar and Jahangir,* p. 81.
22. Ibid., p. 81.
23. A sometimes militant group of Vaiṣṇava ascetics, mostly belonging to the Rāmānandī school of north central India.
24. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal Under Akbar,* p. 86.
25. Basu, *Religious Revivalism,* p. 139.
26. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal Under Akbar,* p. 94.
27. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876–1940,* p. 22.
28. Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital,* p. 144.
29. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead,* p. 26.
30. Cannon, *Letters of Sir William Jones,* vol. 2, p. 754.
31. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead,* p. 27.
32. Bayly, *Indian Society,* p. 41.
33. Ibid., p. 162.
34. We will see this debate in the next chapter in the context of a discussion between the boy Advaita and his father.
35. The *maṅgala kāvya* genre beautifully illustrates this process of mutual integration that took place in local goddess worship between the old indigenous cults and the later-arriving brahmanical overlay. See Smith, *The One-Eyed Goddess,* and Dimock, *The Thief of Love.* I use quotation marks for "Hindu" because the term does not signify a monolithic religious group or set of pratices, but is rather an umbrella term under which fall a vast array of religious practices.
36. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead,* p. 27.
37. Bayly, *Indian Society,* p. 157.
38. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead,* p. 31.
39. Ibid., p. 28.
40. Bayly, *Indian Society,* p. 162.
41. Wolpert, *A New History of India,* p. 207.
42. Ibid., p. 208.
43. Bayly, *Indian Society,* p. 163.
44. Ibid., p. 163.

45. Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal*, p. 69.
46. Ibid., p. 73.
47. Bayly, *Indian Society*, p. 156.
48. Chatterjee, *Texts of Power*, p. 12. This society was founded in 1838 by followers of Henry Derozio.
49. Kopf, *British Orientalism*, p. 6.
50. Ibid., p. 48.
51. Wolpert, *A New History of India*, p. 147.
52. Ross, *The Printed Bengali Character*, p. 118.
53. Bishnu Charan Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 13.
54. Rāsa Pūrṇīmā is the festival commemorating the full moon night on which Kṛṣṇa danced simultaneously with each of the sixteen thousand cowherd girls of Vraja. Advaita's descendants in Shantipur observe the festival in a unique way. Each temple community selects a young girl as the "Rasa Rājā," who is elegantly dressed as Rādhā playfully imitating her lover Kṛṣṇa. She is taken through the town on a palanquin and must remain alert throughout the festivities, all night long. The deities from the several temples connected with Advaita and his family are similarly paraded in elaborately bedecked palanquins, all borne on the shoulders of many "muscle men" specially hired for the occasion. The parades continue all night, and crowds line the streets to watch and to sing devotional songs. Meanwhile the women of the community are cooking large quantities of food to sustain the palanquin bearers.
55. While Kṛṣṇa is always the main image in any Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava temple, each temple's particular image has its individual name. The names usually describe the specific appearance or posture of the image. Śyāma Sundara is "the beautiful dark one."
56. Acintyakumāra Senagupta, *Jagadguru Śrī Śrī Vijayakṛṣṇa*, p. 3.
57. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 17.
58. A desirable trait in South Asian children, especially boys, perhaps better rendered with the English "mischief."
59. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 18.
60. Presumably a reference to Caitanya.
61. Senagupta, *Jagadguru*, p. 3.
62. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 29.
63. Ibid., p. 33.
64. Ibid., pp. 36–38.
65. Ibid., p. 41.
66. Kopf, "The Universal Man," p. 56.
67. Basu, *Religious Revivalism*, p. 22.
68. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 60.
69. Ibid., p. 61. She felt that he as a brahman should maintain caste standards of purity, which include avoiding contact with the bodily fluids of others. This type of contamination could only be counteracted with elaborate ritual cleansing procedures in the case of accidental and/or brief contact, but for a doctor the degree of pollution would be disastrous.

70. Ibid., p. 109.
71. Ibid., p. 62.
72. As is the case today, this would have been a very humiliating insult.
73. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 65.
74. Ibid., p. 68.
75. Ibid., p. 85.
76. About the same age as Advaita, Śrīnivāsa (outside the Advaita corpus, usually referred to as Śrīvāsa) was another respected elder of the founding generation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Another individual, consistently referred to as Śrīnivāsa, played an important role in the second generation of the movement.
77. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 117.
78. Paramahaṁsa Yogānanda describes Trailaṅga Svāmī on pp. 291–295 of his *Autobiography.*
79. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 120.
80. To cite a contemporary illustration of this point, the North Indian yogi Baba Hari Dass (originally from UP's Almora District but now principally based in northern California) took initiation from one Raghubir Dass, a Vairāgī Vaiṣṇava. The Vairāgīs are a (largely) renunciate order that broke off from Rāmānuja's school of *viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified nondualism) in the fourteenth century, under the leadership of Rāmānanda. The Vairāgīs are a sometimes militant order who have been at the forefront of civil uprisings on more than one occasion. Baba Hari Dass, however, is a staunch advocate of nonviolence and bases his own teachings not on the theology of either Rāmānuja or Rāmānanda but simply on Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* and on the *Bhagavad Gītā.*
81. The Kartābhajās, whose name means "Worshippers of the Master," were a very powerful group during the nineteenth century. Their purported founder, Āulcānda, was a Muslim fakir whom his followers believed to be Caitanya returned. The group decried caste and other religious restrictions and came under a great deal of public criticism for their use of sexual rituals. See Urban's thorough study of the group, *The Economics of Ecstasy*, and of some of its literature, *Songs of Ecstasy.*
82. The Bāuls are a deliberately syncretic group whose members dress in both Hindu and Muslim clothing to emphasize their nonacceptance of religious strictures. Their songs describe, in mystically encoded language, their sexo-yogic practices. The Bāuls came to wider attention when Tagore "discovered" them in the early part of the twentieth century. Their membership comes largely from the lower strata of both Hindu and Muslim society in rural Bengal; some are householders and some are renunciates. For details see the work of Jeanne Openshaw and Carol Salomon.
83. The Darveshis are a mystical Muslim offshoot that was widespread in Bengal; like the others mentioned here, they place great importance on the role of the guru and rely on practices not sanctioned by the upper levels of society.
84. The Kishorī-bhajās, according to Biman Bihari Majumdar (*Śrī Caitanyacaritera Upādāna*, p. 574), practiced *parakīya sādhana.* The group would gather at night at various places with their wives and mistresses, and, ignoring caste distinc-

tions, would all eat together. Members believed that liberation lay in imitating the deeds of Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā (Tattwananda, *Vaisnava Sects*, p. 29).

85. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 126.
86. Gayā is particularly but not exclusively sacred to Vaiṣṇavas, for they believe it to be the spot where Viṣṇu himself, in his dwarf incarnation, took one of his legendary three steps to delineate the territory he would claim from the evil King Bali. Still today many people carry their parents' ashes to Gayā for final funeral rites and immersion in the Gaṅgā, an act believed to hasten one's journey toward ultimate liberation.
87. Literally, "(dear) Supreme Swan," a title bestowed on exceptionally accomplished renunciates by their gurus; usually a Śaiva term for the most evolved of ascetics (B.D. Tripathi, *Sadhus of India*, p. 67).
88. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 133.
89. Tripathi, *Sadhus of India*, pp. 224–225.
90. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 140.
91. Nath, *The New Hindu Movement 1886–1911*, p. 33.
92. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 143.
93. Ibid., p. 162.
94. Ibid., p. 162.
95. Nath, *The New Hindu Movement*, p. 34.
96. Bradley-Birt, *Dacca*, p. 14.
97. Ibid., p. 173.
98. *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers*, 1912, p. 159.
99. *Gazetteer*, 1912, p. 160.
100. Ibid., pp. 161–162.
101. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 175.
102. Ibid., p. 212.
103. Ibid., p. 214.
104. CBh 2.19.6–176; CC 1.12.37–39.
105. Senagupta, *Vijaya Kṛṣṇa* Gosvāmī, p. 367.
106. Ibid., p. 368.
107. Ibid., p. 368; this story provides yet another example of an animal dying more or less on command after contact with a saint. We assume that the dog either was transported directly to Vaikuṇṭha or was shortly reborn into a devout Vaiṣṇava family. The CC contains several examples (1.10.80; II.15.278; II.15.102) of dogs, normally not a favored species, being given special praise by Caitanya or even disappearing into Vaikuṇṭha. The most detailed such story, told in III.1.12–28, concerns a dog belonging to Śivānanda Sena. Caitanya taught the dog to say "Kṛṣṇa" and the next day the dog "had gained a perfected body and had gone to Vaikuṇṭha" (translation Dimock's).
108. Das, *Life of Vijaykrishna*, p. 262.
109. Ibid., p. 320.
110. Ibid., p. 327.
111. Ibid., p. 334.
112. This appears to be a unique reference to this person, who is not listed in the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Abhidhāna*.

113. Caudhurī and Mukhopādhyāya, *Vijayakṛṣṇa Gosvāmī Jīvana o Manana*, p. 1.
114. This comment is not as offhanded as it may seem; I have myself heard a few religious leaders describe their alarming size in such terms or explain their bulk as a sign of their compassion in accepting all the food their disciples so generously offer to them.
115. Biographical information on Caudhurī comes from Subir Kar's *Acyutacaraṇa Tattvanidhi: Jīvanī o Sāhitya, 1272–1360*, and secondarily from Jatīndramohana Bhaṭṭācārya's *Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī Tattvanidhi (1272–1360).*
116. The Society of the Companions of the Golden-Bodied Lord; *Śrīśrī Viṣṇupriyā Patrikā* 12.8 published a note from Acyutacaraṇa to this effect, and describing the society's first meeting.
117. In 1892 Hārādhana Datta Bhaktinidhi honored him with the title *Gaurabhūṣaṇa* for his selfless character and his exceptionally thorough knowledge of Vaiṣṇava scriptures. The Nikhilabhārata Literary Society in Kolkata gave him several titles over the years: *Jñānaguṇākara* ("Storehouse of Knowledge"), *Pūrātattva Viśārada* ("Expert in All Knowledge"), *Vidyābhūṣaṇa* ("Ornament of Learning"), *Bhakti Vinoda* ("He Whose Pleasure Is in Devotion"), and *Sāhitya Śāstrī* ("Literary Adept"). The Barddhaman weekly *Pallīvāsī* announced his being awarded the title of *Bhakti Sāgara* ("Ocean of Devotion").
118. Which institution and all its holdings were, sadly, razed in December 1992.
119. BLS introduction, pp. iii-iv.
120. *Payāra* is a very common Bengali metrical form in which each line consists of fourteen syllables.
121. The title is wonderfully multivalent. We could translate it "The Light that was Advaita," "The Revelation about Nondualism," "Advaita's Revelation," and that does not exhaust the possibilities. Even more delightful is the probability that the author intends all of the above simultaneously.
122. See Manring, "At Home in the World" and "Sītā Devī."
123. Literally, "the mood of (Kṛṣṇa's) female companions," a Vaiṣṇava subsect comprised of men who dress and behave like the female companions of Rādhā in Vraja.
124. CC 1.12.62.
125. Chapter 12.
126. *Tripādi* is a common Bengali meter in which each line consists of three feet, and the rhyme scheme is aabccb.
127. Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat MSs 982 and 2885.

5. ANOTHER "BLACK FORGERY" OR MERE PLAY?

1. Caudhurī also discovered two other texts important to Advaita Ācārya's subsect of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement: Lokanātha Dāsa's *Sītā Caritra* (see chapter 7) and Īśāna Nāgara's *Advaita Prakāśa* (see chapter 6). *Advaita Prakāśa*, like the BLS, is full of specific dates.
2. Modern Nadīyā District lies about ninety kilometers north of Kolkata and includes the important towns of Navadvīpa and Shantipur. The International

Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON) has built its world headquarters in nearby Mayapur, birthplace of Caitanya.

3. His name is meaningful: Servant of Kṛṣṇa (an almost generic name in wide use among Vaiṣṇavas) from (the region of) Lāuḍa.
4. BLS 8.3.
5. Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī provides no source for his statement regarding the approximate dates of Lāuḍīya Kṛṣṇadāsa's reign.
6. BLS 6.17.
7. Advaita Ācārya's *huṁkāra*, or roar, is extremely powerful and plays a key role in his life story. The word *huṁkāra* also means "making the sound *huṁ*," a mystical sound uttered as a part of certain Vedic incantations, and as such can have far more impact than an ordinary shout.
8. BLS introduction, pp. v-vii.
9. De, *Early History* (p. 127), reports that the colophon of the text gives the date of composition as Śaka 1522 (c. 1600 C.E.).
10. Occasionally disputes arose in Vṛndāvana over rights to worship in specific temples. Placing an important Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava figure in Vṛndāvana at this very early date in the movement's history is probably a play for authority over various sites in Vraja.
11. An anthology of devotional passages culled from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Several editions have been published, many with Hindi translations. This is the only edition with a Bengali translation of which I am aware.
12. Very probably the same Madhusūdana Gosvāmī in whose collection Śiśira Kumāra Ghoṣa, then (1896) editor of *Amrita Bāzār Patrikā*, found (and eventually transcribed) a manuscript of Murāri Gupta's *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛtam*. Madhusūdana seems to have been a serious literary scholar and may have had amassed a significant manuscript collection of his own; clearly other Vaiṣṇavas in the region valued his judgments.
13. Both Advaita's family and Nityānanda's use Gosvāmī as their surname, so all four of these men may have been descendants of Advaita Ācārya. The word is also a religious title for a Vaiṣṇava renunciate or preacher.
14. *advaita-candrāmvara padma-sūryaḥ*
śrīnātha-nāmā hari-bhakti-dātā
śrīhaṭṭa-deśe hari-bhakti-yukte
jagrāha-sadgrantham imaṁ manojñaṁ
15. "*Bālyalīlāsūtra:* Nineteenth Century Forgery, or Mere Child's Play?" unpublished paper presented at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Oriental Society.
16. A not unusual situation. R. Salomon, H. Hock, and others have convincingly argued for the coexistence of many registers of Sanskrit, not all of which met Pāṇini's rules.
17. See Salomon, "The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* as a Specimen of Vernacular Sanskrit."
18. Sectarian history tells the dramatic tale of Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa staying up all night writing his *Govinda Bhāṣya* to meet the deadline set by a panel of judges at the conference.

19. Van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*," p. 22.
20. Sen mentions *Govindadāsera Kaḍacā* and the *BLS* in the same paragraph, pp. 496–497. See also Karmakara, *Govindadāsera Kaḍacā.*
21. Biman Bihari Majumdar, *Śrīcaitanya Caritera Upādāna*, p. 415.
22. Though, interestingly, the OCLC Word Catalogue classifies the book as fiction!
23. Sen, "The *Karchā* by Govindadas," p. 573.
24. Srinivasan, *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays*, pp. 56–57.
25. Van Buitenen, "On the Archaism," p. 36.
26. De, *Vaisnava Faith and Movement*, p. 568.
27. *Anuṣṭubh; bhattā; rukmavatī; nardaṭaka and paṅkti.*
28. Her name, "Glory of the Family," is certainly *yathārthatā (yathārthakṛtanāman)* as she restores past glory to her lineage and ensures that her nephew will thus be a suitable person to usher in the new Vaiṣṇavism and its propounder.
29. *Vārendra* is a geographical designation for the northern part of Bengal and here refers to those brahmans settled in that region.
30. *Kulīna* brahmans stand at the top of their caste hierarchy. *Kulīna* daughters may not marry beneath themselves, though sons may. These rules eventually resulted in far more females than males in need of *kulīna* marriage partners and consequently in many polygamous, often unconsummated, marriages as enterprising *kulīna* men traveled the countryside in search of brides and their dowries.
31. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *The Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 30. Vārendra brahmans were composed of two grades. *Kulīnas* were the higher grade and *śrotriya* the lower. *Śrotriyas* were further divided; the higher *śrotriya* grade was *siddha* ("realized"). Thus, before Kulojjvalā's marriage, Advaita Ācārya's family belonged to the second division of the top-ranking group.
32. A small oval-shaped stone understood to be a manifestation of the god Viṣṇu.
33. Lābhā's name is also spelled Nābhā. The glyphs for *l* and *n* are identical in earlier Bengali manuscripts.
34. Mid January to mid February.
35. Standard accompaniments to the birth of a religiously significant figure in South Asia.
36. Mid March to mid April.
37. Although I was aware that time was nearing for the Paṇā Tīrtha observance when I was conducting my fieldwork in Bangladesh, my efforts to learn the exact dates for 1994 were repeatedly frustrated. Ironically, only a few days after the festival, I finally made contact with someone who knew about it, and I was ultimately able to travel to the area, albeit too late for this celebration.
38. This may sound strange to readers who have not seen anthills in South Asia. Those impressive structures can be as tall as a ten-year-old child.
39. The *Vedāṅgas* are six classes of works traditionally regarded as auxiliary to, or even part of, the Vedas themselves. These are *śikṣā*, "phonetics"; *chandas*, "meter"; *vyākaraṇa*, "grammar"; *nirukta*, "etymology"; *jyotiṣa*, "astronomy/astrology"; *kalpa*, which Monier-Williams translates as "ceremonial" and deals with how to use all of the *Vedāṅgas* in performing Vedic ritual. These

materials would constitute a standard part of a young brahman's educational curriculum.

40. Seventh month of the Bengali calendar, corresponding to mid-October to mid-November.
41. Mastery of the *dharma* treatises would constitute the final stage of a brahman boy's education.
42. As Vāmanāvatāra, the Dwarf Incarnation, Viṣṇu took one of his legendary three steps here at Gayā, in the modern Indian state of Bihar, and so the Viṣṇupada Temple was built on that very spot. As Caitanya would do many years later, Advaita carried his deceased parents' ashes to that most sacred place, where he would hire a priest to perform the necessary rituals for merging the ashes into the holy Gāṅgā, thereby hoping to ensure his parents no future rebirth.
43. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 10. Rāḍhīyas (on the west bank of the Gaṅgā), Vārendras, Vaidikas (Caitanya's group), and Saptasatis (the original Bengali *brahmans*).
44. Majumdāra, *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa*, p. 69.
45. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 15, found at least three different dates: 942, 1032, and 1060. R. C. Majumdāra, however (*History of Bengal*, p. 581) proposes the very early date of 732.
46. M. Majumdāra, *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa*, p. 75.
47. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 57.
48. Majumdāra, *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa*, p. 74.
49. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, p. 627.
50. Majumdāra, *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa*, p. 89.
51. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 52.
52. Ibid., p. 57.
53. Ibid., p. 56.
54. Majumdāra, *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa*, p. 171.
55. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 64.
56. Wakil, *Bāṅglā sāhityera puravṛtta*, p. 87.
57. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 64.
58. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, p. 2; p. 77; p. 102.
59. We have no reason to question Advaita's approximate date of birth.
60. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, p. 77.
61. Majumdar, *Bengali History*, p. 633.
62. Elsewhere in this chapter we find citations from Kṛṣṇakānta Bhaduḍī's *Vārendra Kulapañjika* (n.d.), and most likely this story comes from that genealogy.
63. The Gauḍīyas generally espouse a "caste no bar" philosophy that welcomes disciples from all social strata; yet here we see that to the author of the BLS, at least, social status is extremely important.
64. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 65. Richard Eaton (*Rise of Islam*, p. 50) gives the broader dates of 1400–1421 for the period of Raja Ganeśa's influence.
65. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 59; Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 50–56. Raja Ganeśa was a landholder from a long-prominent Bengali

family. Eaton reports conflicting accounts of his history, including whether or not Ganeśa seized the throne, and, if so, for how long, but clearly Ganeśa became a somewhat unexpected force for the Turkish rulers of Bengal to reckon with and a rallying point for the Hindu landholders.

66. Raychaudhuri and Raychaudhuri, *Brahmans of Bengal*, p. 64. As is evident, daughters are key to maintaining *kulīna* caste ranking.
67. Bhaṭṭācārya, *Śāntipura-paricaya*, pp. 336.
68. Both are forms of Śiva.
69. See chapter 6 for full discussion of the AP.
70. Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*, pp. 496–497.
71. Among these are Edward C. Dimock, whose masterful translation of the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, edited by Tony K. Stewart, appeared very shortly before his death; Ramakanta Chakrabarty, in Kolkata, whose lengthy work on Nityānanda will soon be forthcoming, and Tony K. Stewart, who consulted most of the extant Vaiṣṇava hagioigraphy in producing his own unpublished manuscript on Caitanya, "The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritāmṛta and the Grammar of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Tradition."
72. Stewart, "When Biographical Narratives Disagree," p. 232.
73. See Manring and Stewart, "In the Name of Devotion." At the time we were producing that article I strongly suspected Caudhurī himself produced all three of the compositions we described, that is, the *Bālya-Līlā-Sūtra*, the *Advaita Prakāśa*, and the *Sītā Caritra*.
74. Sen, *Bāṅgalā Sāhitya Itihāsa*, p. 302.
75. Majumdāra, *Śrī Caitanyacaritera Upādāna*, pp. 473–480. However, several of the Shantipur Vaiṣṇavas privately acknowledged to me their skepticism about both the BLS and the AP.
76. Banerjee, *Logic in a Popular Form*, p. 111.
77. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, p. 63.
78. Ibid., p. 111.
79. Allen, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers*, 1912, pp. 417–420

6. ADVAITA PRAKĀŚA

1. Māgh 1303, Part 3, No. 4, pp. 51–61. Bepin Vihari Dasgupta (in his *A Black Forgery*) reports a different provenance for the text, alluding to the possibility that both AP and *Govindadāsera Kaḍacā* were composed by Joy Gopal Goswami, of Shantipur, in the late nineteenth century (p. 12).
2. Īśāna and Acyuta were both born in 1492.
3. I cite Tony K. Stewart, unpublished manuscript, "The Final Word."
4. Dhaka University Manuscript No. 4683. Its colophon indicates that it was copied in 1892 from a manuscript dated 1780. The paper and style of handwriting support this date. The manuscript is clearly not an original text, as throughout can be seen examples of the scribe's having lost his place, in the exemplar and repeated passages, and later correcting his errors.

5. One apparent recurring theme in Acyutacaraṇa Caudhurī's *Śrīhaṭṭera Itivṛtta* is the notion, repeated here, that a series of migrations from Sylhet is responsible for the cultural flourishing of western Bengal. These migrations may have been the result of famine or other environmental problem in Sylhet.
6. A tribal group who probably originated in Southeast Asia and speak a Muṇḍa language. Many Khasis today live in the Indian state of Meghalaya, which adjoins Lāuḍa.
7. Mṛṇālakānti Ghoṣa also published the third edition of Murāri Gupta's *Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Caritāmṛtam,* in 1930, at which time he changed that text's date of composition from 1503 to 1513. In the ensuing uproar, as Tony Stewart points out ("The Biographical Images of Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya," p. 64), scholars demanded a reexamination of the original manuscripts, but no one could locate these materials. Ghoṣa seems to have been involved with quite a number of Vaiṣṇava publication projects, as he also edited an edition of Locana Dāsa' s *Caitanya Maṅgala* for Amṛta Bājāra Patrikā in 1947.
8. As discussed in chapter 5, *Siddha śrotriyas* ranked just below *kulīnas* among brahman society, so Īśāna was fairly well-born.
9. Now known as Rāyaghara, in Dhaka District of Bangladesh.
10. Edward C. Dimock and Tony K. Stewart, in the bibliography of their monumental *Caitanyacaritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja,* mention another edition edited by Kiśorī Dāsa Bābājī as *Śrīgauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Śāstra* No. 22, in Hālisahara, 24 Paragaṇā, n.d. (p. 1049). I have not seen this edition myself, but Stewart assures me that its text does not differ from that of the other editions.
11. Manring, *The Glory of Lord Advaita.*
12. Dreams very late at night are understood to be prescient, that is to say, true.
13. Hari is another name for Viṣṇu, and Hara, for Śiva. When speaking of their dual embodiment writers often use the term *Hari-Hara,* allowing the phonological similarity of the two names to highlight their essential unity.
14. Compare this to the mere mention, with no explanation, of Yama early in the BLS, discussed in the previous chapter.
15. The month which begins in late January and continues for 28 days; in 2001 Māghī *saptamī* fell on January 31.
16. *Tīrthas* are usually located next to moving bodies of water, as will become evident shortly.
17. The last month of the Bengali year, mid-March to mid-June. This festival, known as *Vāruṇī-snāna,* is still observed.
18. The Gauḍīyas use the term *Svayam Bhagavān* to refer to the undivided, complete, personal Ultimate Reality and not simply an *avatāra* thereof. Svayam Bhagavān is unrestricted in every way and can disperse portions of himself elsewhere without being diminished. The *gosvāmīs* codified this theology and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja expanded upon it in his CC.
19. Another name of Viṣṇu, and hence of Kṛṣṇa. This association goes back at least to the Pāñcarātras and refers to an awe-inspiring and remote supreme deity, not the approachable and more more personal Vaiṣṇava god.

20. Much as happens when any non-human encounters the divine; see previous chapters for similar accounts.
21. Archer, *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta*, p. 49. The painting in question is entitled "Cat with Prawn," and the prawn is nearly as large as the cat!
22. See relevant discussion in chapter 1.
23. The general cultural understanding is that assiduous practice of austerities automatically results in one's obtaining magical powers. The eight powers, or *siddhis*, are described in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras: aṇimā* (the power to become tiny), *laghimā* (the power to become very light), *prāpti* (the power of obtaining everything), *prākāmyam* (the power of irresistible will), *mahimā* (the power to become very large), *īśitvam* (the power of supremacy over everything), *vaśitvam* (the power of great radiance), *kāmāvasāyitva* (the power of suppressing desire).
24. This means that Lābhā had given birth to her now thirteen-year-old son when she was seventy-seven years of age, a miracle Īśāna never points out.
25. Kamalākṣa makes a pun on the names of both cities when he refers to the Oriyan town as Nābhigayā (a standard epithet for Puri).
26. Madhva, a thirteenth-century philosopher, is credited with the founding of the purely dualistic Brahmā school of Vaiṣṇavism. Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa nominally connected the Gauḍīyas to this school in the eighteenth century.
27. A mysterious text that seems to have disappeared without a trace.
28. Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory*, p. 112.
29. Reynolds and Capps, *The Biographical Process*, p. 1.
30. Temple images have specific names, and each name denotes a particular pose or scenario. An image called Madana Mohana would look like the Kṛṣṇa of Advaita's dream. One called Gopāla would be much simpler, resembling a cowherd boy with a flute, without adornment. Both are understood to be the same Kṛṣṇa.
31. See full discussion in chapter 2.
32. See Haberman, "Śrī Nāthajī" and Charlotte Vaudeville, "Multiple Approaches," for a full account of this story.
33. He has no doubt heard of the scandal caused when his Aunt Kulojjvalā was married above her station.
34. This same story can be found in the CC, 2.4.104–168.
35. Since Kṛṣṇa is Svayaṁ Bhagavān, the Lord Himself, he can distribute himself over any number of bodies in any proportion he chooses without suffering any diminution of his original essential being.
36. Prahlāda, a very pious devotee of Viṣṇu, was the son of the mighty demon king Hiraṇyakāsipu. Hiraṇyakāsipu, enraged that his son esteemed someone more than his father, tried everything he could think of to kill his son, including having thousands of his minions attack him with various deadly weapons. The child simply endured the onslaughts calmly, his mind firmly attached to Viṣṇu. Finally Viṣṇu himself appeared as Narasiṁha to vanquish the demon. The story can be found in various Purāṇas and is most detailed in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

37. In a culture in which the stereotype is that many women take great pride in their long thick luxuriant hair, this penance is severe indeed.
38. Īśāna does not tell us if this "true form" is, as we would expect for Haridāsa, Brahmā.
39. See note 20, above; this seems to be the standard way of describing an animal's salvation.
40. I am indebted to Tony K. Stewart for this analysis of Advaita's role in Caitanya's birth, which he discussed in his 1997 article "When Rāhu Devours the Moon."
41. Due to the river's changing course in subsequent monsoon seasons, Shantipur is no longer situated on the river bank.
42. The first month of the Bengali calendar, late April to late May.
43. Also called Caitra, the last month of the Bengali year.
44. The seventh month, late October to late November.
45. The ninth month, late December to late January.
46. The second month, late May to late June.
47. Numerous varieties of bananas grow in the tropics. Caitanya was particularly fond of the small finger bananas.
48. Ritual food offerings comprise a standard part of the ritual day and would be activity with which the child was very familiar.
49. Tony K. Stewart, personal correspondence, April 1, 2004.
50. Vaiṣṇavas adorn their bodies with markings (which vary to some extent from school to school) to make visible their devotion.
51. See discussion of this concept in chapter 1.
52. Ramakanta Chakrabarty is preparing a definitive study of the literature treating Nityānanda.
53. Dimock, *Place of the Hidden Moon*, pp. 88–91.
54. A reference to Nityānanda's identity with Balarāma, who in turn is identified with Ananta, the many-headed cosmic serpent on whom Viṣṇu rests between ages of creation.
55. Some of the *padāvalī* describe Advaita as a short, pot-bellied old man, and he is sometimes called Vāmanāvatāra, the dwarf incarnation, so he must have been very short as well.
56. Entwistle, *Braj*, p. 167.
57. No composition of Caitanya's survives, and most scholars doubt that a man prone to such fits of devotional ecstasy as he could have written a cogent treatise of any sort.
58. See Stewart, "When Biographical Narratives Disagree," for a complete discussion of how the various authors treat the death of Caitanya.
59. The full moon day when devotees worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa by placing their images side by side on a swing (*dola*).
60. Traditionally a brahman man moves out of the householder stage of life once he has a grandson.
61. *Tūlasī*, or sacred basil, is herself a devotee of Kṛṣṇa and always present in the courtyard of his temple and his devotee's home.
62. The leaders of Nityānanda's sect.

63. Whose leaders were Acyuta, Kṛṣṇa Miśra, Gopāla Ṭhākura, Vīracandra, Narahari Śarkāra, Gaurīdāsa Paṇḍita, and Damodara Paṇḍita.
64. This is probably not an accurate representation. Nityānanda's school presents Jāhnavā in the same way that Advaita's presents Sītā after their respective husbands' deaths.
65. Stewart, "The Death of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya," p. 234.
66. Ibid.
67. The pro forma association of the Gauḍīya *Sampradāya* (school) with Madhva's much older group is an interesting and controversial story but is not germane to the present discussion. For details, see Hardy, "Mādhavendra Purī."
68. An earlier form of Vaiṣṇavism, also known as the Bhāgavata sect, popular as early as the sixth century C.E. See note 41 in chapter 2.
69. Again I invoke Tony K. Stewart's use of this expression.

7. SĪTĀ DEVĪ: GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

1. CC 3.2.101–164.
2. Sometimes called Jāhnavā.
3. The author of the *Advaita Prakāśa* claims Advaita Ācārya lived to the age of 125, an apparently standard attestation not necessarily to be taken literally.
4. Ray, "Nāgārjuna's Longevity," in Schober, *Sacred Biography*, p. 133.
5. Ibid., p. 135.
6. CC 1.13.110–111 describes Sītā as she goes to visit the infant Caitanya and may be the sole reference to Sītā in the composition.
7. We can never know exactly what happened in historical terms, and fortunately the precise historical details are not what is of interest here; rather we are interested in learning how and why the community describes itself as it does.
8. In *sahajiyā* Vaiṣṇavism, a hundred-petalled lotus represents the heart *cakra* and is associated with the novice stage of practice. Tantra practitioners envision energy flowing through the body in the spinal column and along two currents twined around the spinal column. The *cakras* are energy centers spaced along the spine and envisioned as lotuses of specified colors and numbers of petals. This may be relevant in light of attempts to bring the entire range of Vaiṣṇava practice, including the less mainstream *sahajiyā* and *sakhī bhāva* groups, under the umbrella of Advaita's school.
9. Īśāna's story of Sītā's birth is remarkably similar to the story of Rādhā's birth, frequently told in Vraja. Vṛkhabhānu was drawn to the bank of the Yamunā River by a mysterious bright light. Upon approaching, he discovered the light to be emanating from a lotus in the middle of the river, in which was seated a tiny girl (Haberman, *Twelve Forests*, p. 220). While I have never seen a written textual source for this story, it is part of the oral history of Vraja that pilgrims and local residents alike delight in telling each other. I have also heard similar stories about Jānakī Sītā of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but have been unable to find textual support for such a story. Sukumar Sen (*Origin and Development of the Rāma*

Legend) mentions several accounts of that Sītā's origin, but none is similar to the birth story discussed above.

10. Another name for Lakṣmī, and so the two girls are also being equated.
11. See discussion of *kulīn*ism in chapter 5.
12. Marriage of sisters to a single man seems not to have been unusual, according to the late Professor Ahmad Sharif (private conversation, April 20, 1994), and may have been justified on the grounds that the sisters could comfort each other when they found themselves in the strange and possibly hostile environment of their husband's household.
13. *Advaita Maṅgala* vi., pp. 158–159.
14. Sītā's father Nṛsiṁha Bhāḍudi was a *kulīna* brahman, the biographers write. *Kulīnas* comprised the top stratum of Bengali brahman society (see discussion in chapter 5) and were prized as grooms by members of the next two levels of brahmans (*siddha śrotriya* and *sādhya śrotriya*, respectively), whose daughters were eligible brides for *kulīna* males. *Kulīna* girls, however, were supposed to marry only other *kulīnas*, and this is one reason Nṛsiṁha is shown to have had some reticence about marrying his daughters to Advaita, who was a *siddha śrotriya* brahman.
15. Various of Advaita's associates had long been urging him to marry and produce the sons needed to help him in his mission.
16. Published in two volumes by Hṛṣikeśa Vedāntaśāstrī at Dvarbhanga College in Mithila, c. 1930.
17. This would also explain why Kavi Karṇapūra refers to Viṣṇudāsa as Advaita Ācārya's son in his *Śrī Caitanya Candrodaya Nāṭaka*.
18. As is apparent from the discussion in chapter 2, Mādhavendra Pūrī, his origins and his sectarian affiliation remain among the great mysteries of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Hṛṣikeśa's note in his introduction is both tantalizing and frustrating.
19. *Rājātaraṅganī* vi. 74–83.
20. Sen, *Bengali Language and Literature*, p. 277. Professor Sen estimates that the earliest work on Manasā Devī dates from the twelfth century.
21. See Stewart, *Peerless Pirs and Fabulous Females.*
22. Whom we are certainly to understand as the Īśāna who composed AP.
23. At the same time, establishing a chronology of text production, though not always possible, can be very useful in charting a figure's place in the group. The setting sun often elicits the most dramatic observations.
24. Rūpa, or Svarūpa, named in the Advaita hagiographies as the twin brother of Jagadīśa, is not included in Lokanātha's list.
25. For a very detailed analysis of the mythology of the birth of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, see Stewart, "When Rahu Devours the Moon."
26. As mentioned in chapter 6, I owe the development of this discussion to Tony K. Stewart; see his article "When Rahu Devours the Moon."
27. CC iii.19.15–28.
28. R. G. Bhandarkar's comment on this mode of worship is telling of attitudes to women even in modern times: "When the female element is idolized and

made the object of special worship, such disgusting corruption must ensue." *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism*, p. 86.

29. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal*, p. 249.
30. CC 1.4–2.8. This is a very controversial assumption, and the joint incarnation notion does not appear until the later Caitanya hagiographies.
31. These social strictures applied to high-caste women and much less so to others.
32. See relevant discussion in chapter 3.
33. In one manuscript the pair claim that bathing in the Gaṅgā caused the sex change.
34. *"Guruṁ gurudevāya vidmahe paramātmane dhīmahi tanno guruḥ pracodayāt."* See discussion of Gāyatrī and its variations in chapter 3 and in Sadguru Sant Keshavadas's nonscholarly but nonetheless informative *Gāyatrī: The highest meditation.*
35. Also known as the Gaura Gāyatrī mantra:
    mannāmoktvā vidmahe hantaṁ saturyaṁ dhīmahyantaṁ ne'ntam viśvambharañca
    tanno gauraḥ prādico 'trirmaruccāt, gāyatryeṣa gānatantrānakartrī
36. *"Klīṁ kāmadevāya vidmahe puṣpabānāya dhīmahi tanno'naṅgaḥ pracodayāt"*; see chapter 3.
37. *Klīṁ* is the *bīja* (seed) mantra associated with Kṛṣṇa as well as with the *kāma gāyatrī*. *Hrīṁ* is the *bīja* mantra associated with Rādhā. These elaborate instructions are strongly reminiscent of some tantric practices in which followers first visualize the surroundings of the deity, then the deity with all his or her accoutrements, and finally become that deity. Sītā's meditation places the practitioner in the divine entourage rather than as the deity itself.
38. According to my editing, chapters 7, 8, 12, and 13.
39. The Bengali word here is *subā*, a word that often denotes a European. This possibility has further interesting implications, as will be discussed in the paragraphs following.
40. See note 39. Haricaraṇa's story of Jaṅgalī's encounter (in the AM, with a king) is much less dramatic.
41. Sufi ascetics.
42. Sen, *History of Bengali Literature*, pp. 130–133. In his subsequent *Islāmi Bāṅglā Sāhitya* (p. 82) Sen also mentions the names of Muslim writers who told the same story in their own works, which they usually termed "Gāzī Sāhebera Gāna"; most prominent among the Muslim authors was Ābdul Gafur.
43. CBh 1.11.67–155; CC 1.10.43.
44. "Clearly," because the use of Īśāna's name here is part of a larger effort to demonstrate that Īśāna was a historical figure close to both Advaita and Caitanya and hence a reliable witness to major events in both their lives.
45. An epithet of Śiva.
46. CC 3.2.100–164.
47. See discussion and diagram in the introduction.
48. Advaita has also been identified as Īśvara and as Sadāśiva. For a more detailed discussion of these theological identifications, see chapters 2 and 6.

49. Erotic relationships, including relationships with Kṛṣṇa, are defined as either *svakīya* ([with] one's own [woman]), i.e., socially sanctioned, or *parakīya* ([with] another's [woman]), i.e., illicit. See more detailed discussion in chapter 2.
50. See the discussion in chapter 3 of Yogamāyā and her theological significance.
51. Sītā Devī as the wife of a founding member seems at first glance to belong to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism's first generation. However, because she did not rise to prominence until after Caitanya, Nityānanda, and Advaita (who outlived the younger men) had died, she does indeed belong to the movement's second generation.
52. AP chapter 11.
53. Ibid., chapter 22.
54. Chakrabarty, *Vaiṣnavism in Bengal,* p. 129.

8. ADVAITA ĀCĀRYA TODAY

1. Kālīkṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭācārya, writing in the mid-1930s, also noted descendants of Advaita living in Mymensingh, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Pharidpur, and several other towns in modern Bangladesh.
2. Subalacandra Maitra published a pamphlet entitled "Mandiramaya Śrīdhāma Shantipura" for the Shantipura Loka Saṁskṛti Pariṣat on the occasion of the 1988 Rāsa Līlā celebrations, naming eleven Advaita-lineage temples and describing the images housed in each.
3. The honorific enclitic ā-*dī* ("elder sister") is used when addressing a slightly older woman.
4. *Śāntipura-paricaya,* p. 382.
5. For example, Nātha, *Śāntipura.*
6. Netaji, "Dear Leader," 1897–1945, was an important figure in the Indian nationalist movement. He disappeared mysteriously and is assumed to have died in an airplane crash in 1945 while en route to Tokyo. His likeness is found permanently in most West Bengal towns and cities.
7. In his article, "Śrīhaṭṭa Sāhitya Pariṣat Granthāgāre Rakṣita Hastalikhita Bāṅglā Pūthira Tālikā."
8. An affectionate honorific enclitic attached to first names of older men for whom one wants to indicate a close but respectful relationship.

9. CONCLUSIONS

1. I use the term *saint* rather loosely to denote a person viewed by his or her religious community as exemplary in some positive way.
2. Delehaye, *The Work of the Bollandists,* p. 8.
3. Ibid., p. 28.
4. Ibid., p. 37.
5. Ibid., p. 58.
6. Ibid., p. 48.

7. William R. LaFleur, "Sacred Biography," in Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, p. 220.
8. Delehaye, *Bollandists*, p. 209.
9. Hefferman. *Sacred Biography*, p. 35.
10. The late Sukumar Sen comes most immediately to mind; he amassed a collection of hundreds of manuscripts of medieval Bengali literature over the course of his career.
11. As was the case with *Govindadāsera Kaḍacā* (see chapter 5).
12. Bhattacharjee, *Catalogus Catalogorum of Bengali Manuscripts*.
13. With the exception of a very few pieces which were either too fragile or too large to film. See Manring, *Catalogue of the Sukumar Sen (Barddhamān Sāhitya Sabhā) Manuscript Collection*.
14. Bimānabihārī Majumdāra, *Śrīcaitanya Caritrera Upādāna*, pp. 465–473.
15. The arguments in this section first appeared in Manring and Stewart, "In the Name of Devotion." I have since altered my conclusions slightly.
16. Personal correspondence with author, November 1995.
17. Manring and Stewart, "In the Name of Devotion," p. 22.
18. Cox, *Bibliography in Late Antiquity*, p. 37.
19. Head, *Medieval Hagiography*, p. xiii.
20. Rineheart, *One Lifetime, Many Lives*, p. 15.
21. Lorenzen, *Bhakti Religion*, p. 182.
22. Granoff and Shinohara, *Speaking of Monks*, introduction.

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